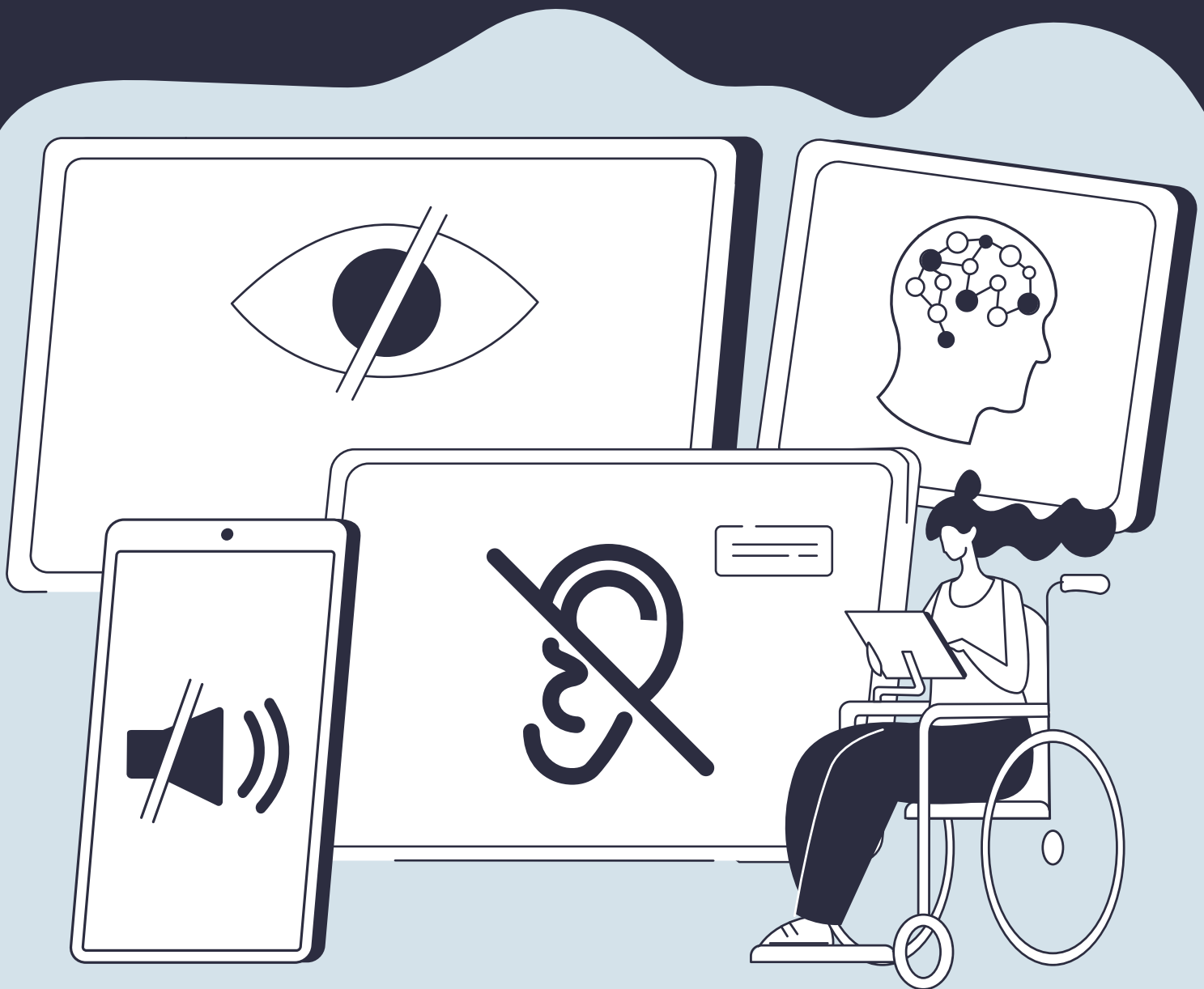


# 2024

## Veterans Affairs Canada's Accessibility Progress Report



Veterans Affairs Canada Accessibility Progress Report 2024

Aussi disponible en français sous le titre : Rapport d'étape d'Anciens Combattants  
Canada en matière d'accessibilité 2024

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# Veterans Affairs Canada Accessibility Progress Report 2024

Note: As of the date of publication, this Accessibility Progress Report (the Report) has been verified for accessibility. If you have any issues with this report, please [contact us](#).

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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 Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC), to establish a process for receiving and dealing with accessibility-related feedback.

Feedback on accessibility can include your thoughts on:

- VAC’s Accessibility Action Plan (the Plan) and Progress Reports
- accessibility barriers at VAC
- how accessibility barriers at VAC can be identified, removed, and prevented
- 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 Reports 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  
Attention: Project Officer, Implementation and Strategic Support

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 (for example, 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 and progress reports. We

will include your feedback and how we used it in our future Accessibility Action Plans and Progress Reports.

### **Alternate formats**

The following are available in alternate format by using the contact information above:

- 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 considered

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 Accessibility Action Plan 2022-2025](#) (the Plan) identifies several 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 have released its first ever [Accessibility Progress Report 2023](#), which highlights achievements since the Plan was implemented in 2022.

This Accessibility Progress Report 2024 does not cover the entire calendar year, given the time that was required to have the Report approved and published. VAC's Accessibility Progress Report 2024 will touch on areas such as internal and external consultations, and organizational culture shift. Any progress made in 2024 that is not addressed in this Report will be carried over and covered in the Accessibility Action Plan 2025-2028.

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.

### **1.3 Progress at a glance**

In December 2022, VAC released its Accessibility Action Plan 2022-2025 with 37 actions to remove and prevent accessibility barriers. In 2023, two new actions and one new barrier were added, followed in 2024 with six new actions and two new barriers. One barrier and three action items were split and revised resulting in an additional eight new actions.

VAC is on track to meet the commitments set out in the Department's Accessibility Action Plan 2022-2025.

The Accessibility Progress Report 2024 now identifies 53 actions in total. Of these 53 actions:

- 24 actions were/will be completed by December 2024:
  - 19 that have been completed as of June 2024.
  - Five that were/will be completed by December 2024.
- 26 actions are in progress:
  - Ten had their completion dates changed due to delays caused by factors depending on other organizations, or needing more work than expected. Changes in completion dates are identified in Section 2 on this Report.
  - 16 are on track to be completed by their original dates of completion.
- Three actions have not yet started:
  - Two have maintained their original completion dates.
  - One has had its completion date changed due to delays. This is because more work was deemed necessary than initially anticipated. This change is identified in Section 2 on this Report.

Of note, 20 of these actions pertain directly to Veterans and their families while 33 actions focus internally to VAC staff and operations.



## 1.4 Message from the Deputy Minister and VAC’s Accessibility Champion

We are pleased to share the final progress report on Veterans Affairs Canada’s Accessibility Action Plan 2022-2025. This document highlights the significant advancements we have made across all priority areas. This report fulfills the requirements of the [Accessible Canada Act](#) and the [Accessible Canada Regulations](#).

As with our [Accessibility Action Plan 2022-2025](#) and [Accessibility Progress Report 2023](#), this document has been shaped by feedback from and consultation with persons with disabilities. We are committed to ensuring that individuals with lived experience are involved in shaping the policies that affect them, as described in “[Nothing without Us](#).”

As the Department’s Deputy Minister, and as Champion of Accessibility, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to our Veterans and their families, the Accessibility Network, and our employees for sharing your experiences and thoughts on accessibility. Your input is crucial.

We are committed to identifying, removing, and preventing the barriers you have faced and to sharing our progress on the accessibility plan. Our goal is to ensure our programs, services, and benefits are accessible and that our employees have the tools needed to be successful.

Our vision extends beyond compliance, it is about cultivating a Department where everyone understands what accessibility is and why it matters. Although we have made progress in the past two years, our work is far from complete. As we move forward, we will continue to identify, remove, and prevent barriers at VAC.

We invite you to read the Progress Report 2024 and welcome your thoughts and feedback as we work together with our Government of Canada colleagues towards [a barrier-free Canada by 2040](#).

Paul Ledwell  
Deputy Minister

Pierre Tessier  
Champion of Accessibility

## 1.5 Accessibility statement

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: in progress

- VAC is committed to building a diverse workforce that is representative of the Canadian population. As of January 2023, workforce representation among employees has been falling short of workforce availability for persons with disabilities. 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.
  - **Completed by:** June 2025
  - **Roles and responsibilities:** Chief Financial Officer and Corporate Services (CFOCS) Branch
  - **Status:** In progress

This is a long-term goal and in alignment with targets set in the Departmental Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan. We expect to achieve the target by 2025.

Update as of October 2024:

- Representation of Persons with Disabilities has increased over the year from 7.2% in July 2023, to 8.8% of VAC's population today. The workforce availability of persons with disabilities is 9.5% (our target today) and as such, VAC continues to see under-representation of persons with disabilities in our workforce.

- This upward trend could be tied to the Government of Canada’s Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada, which set a goal to hire 5,000 persons with disabilities by 2025.
- Representation of persons with disabilities for indeterminate employees is 8.5%, while for term employees representation is 9.1%.
- Higher representation in the term employee population means that the Department is at risk of seeing representation drop if term contracts are not renewed.
- Representation of persons with disabilities in the Executive cadre is at 8.8% as of October, well above the workforce availability of 5.5%.

### **Action #2 for employment barrier #1: completed**

- Develop VAC-specific tools for more accessible and inclusive hiring with the goal of closing the representation gaps for people with disabilities.
  - **Completed by:** June 2023
  - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch
  - **Status:** Completed

### **Action #3 for employment barrier #1: completed**

- 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

### **Action #4 (Part 1) for employment barrier #1: in progress**

- 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 (completed)
  - undertake a review of onboarding materials to ensure they include links to accessibility-related supports, and how to obtain them
  - **Completed by:** ~~December 2023~~ **Revised:** December 2024

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

The Onboarding module created by the Diversity and Inclusion Centre of Excellence is being reviewed by the Accessibility Network and a draft has been shared with the Learning Team who will post the material and ensure it is included in the onboarding process.

**Action #4 (Part 2) for employment barrier #1: in progress**

- Launch a self-identification campaign.
- Undertake a review of language used in recruitment communications to ensure it is welcoming, accessible, and inclusive.
  - **Completed by:** December 2025
  - **Roles and Responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch
  - **Status:** In progress

Significant progress has been made to date with respect to correspondence with candidates throughout each phase of the application process. On track to meet the timeline of December 2025.

The modernization self-ID process is anticipated to be launched by Central Agencies by December 2024.

**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: in progress**

- 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~~ **Revised:** December 2024
  - **Roles and Responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch
  - **Status:** In progress

The selection process is underway to resource a team for this unit and will be completed by December 2024.

### **Action #2 for employment barrier #2: in progress**

- Create a Duty to Accommodate checklist for managers which includes links to resources, policies, practices and guidelines. Guidelines should include expected time frames.
- Create Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) to demystify the Duty to Accommodate process for employees and managers, offering tips on what is necessary for efficient approvals of Duty to Accommodate 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](#) (CSPS) 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)
  - **Completed by:** June 2024
  - **Roles and Responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch
  - **Status:** In progress

The GC Workplace Accessibility Passport has been implemented at VAC and we are officially recognized as an adopting organization. Information sessions were held in January and February 2024 with the Accessibility Network, the National Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Committee (NDIAC), Bargaining Agents, National Occupational Health and Safety Policy Committee, Executives, and the VAC Managers Network, with the tool having been communicated to all staff by email.

To recognize International Day for Persons with Disabilities, the Accessibility Champion shared numerous learning resources and confirmed that all managers complete the CSPS's course Disability Management and Workplace Wellness by December 2024.

FAQs and checklists with respect to the Duty to Accommodate had been developed and shared with all executives in the Winter 2023 to support implementation of the Direction for Onsite Presence. These tools have been updated throughout the year and will once again be updated this spring.

### **2.1.3 Employment barrier #3:**

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

### **Action #1 (Part 1) for employment barrier #3: in progress**

- 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 2024-25 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:** ~~June 2024~~ **Revised:** June 2025
    - **Roles and Responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch
    - **Status:** In progress

### **Action #1 (Part 2) for employment barrier #3: in progress**

- Provide hiring managers with a list of software and the accessibility status of each. Identify accessible alternatives. (Action wording revised)
  - **Completed by:** June 2024
  - **Roles and Responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch
  - **Status:** In progress

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.

## **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: completed**

- 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

### **2.2.2 The built environment barrier #2:**

- While workspaces are fit to include standard ergonomic equipment (for example, 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 their individual needs.

#### **Action #1 for the built environment barrier #2: completed**

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

### **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: completed**

- 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

Within all VAC head offices and field offices we have created an approved signage that has been put up. Within this signage we have outlined existing contact points for expressing concerns of accessibility issues which included; Accessibility Email, Telephone number and Quick Response (QR) code linked to the accessibility webpage survey. These three contact points were outlined within the Department approved posted sign for ongoing feedback. From here any accessibility related items will be filtered and properly triaged by the accessibility teams using their already in place procedures in relation to their contact points that were used in the accessibility signage. The contact information we put on the accessibility signage and placed within VAC offices were contact points previously established by the accessibility team.

#### **2.2.4 The built environment barrier #4:**

- Safety equipment (for example, 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: in progress**

- 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:** In progress

We are currently finalizing a statement of work for hiring a consultant. They will review our existing safety equipment fit up, including position of items, furniture, color schemes, flooring, and imagery.

#### **2.2.5 The built environment barrier #5:**

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



### **Action #1 for the built environment barrier #5: completed**

- Review and evaluate VAC's emergency and business continuity planning and 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 and SD Branch
  - **Status:** Completed

### **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: in progress**

- 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:** December 2025
  - **Roles and Responsibilities:** Commemoration and Public Affairs (CPA) Branch, CFOCS Branch, and experts (for example PSPC, contractors)
  - **Status:** In progress
- Thirteen sites in France and Belgium, representing 87% of Canada's First World War overseas memorials, were assessed in November/December 2023.
  - Cemetery and Grave Marker Maintenance (CGMM), through PSPC, has completed its assessment for Veterans Cemetery in Esquimalt, British Columbia in 2023-2024.
- In Esquimalt we were only able to complete partial upgrades to the pathway in the forest garden area. PSPC is experiencing difficulty in finding a contractor that, first, wants to do the project and, second, at a fair market price. Currently the failed tenders all came back quoting double fair market value. Without those levels of funding available, we are having to pivot and will focus on some ground preparatory work this fiscal year and will have the remaining brickwork completed next year. The forest garden area remains accessible as the current pathway consists of hardpack crushed gravel and sand that can be easily navigated. We are in the midst of minor

modifications within the columbaria plateau to allow easier navigation to and from the forest garden area for larger assistive devices and our equipment to access the area.

- The remaining two sites overseas will be assessed in early 2025.
- A technical review of [Fort Massey Cemetery](#), which included accessibility, was completed in 2023. VAC has yet to receive the final report from PSPC. The report is expected in May/June 2024. Once received, any accessibility items will be assessed and addressed with other infrastructure and property-based projects identified at Fort Massey. Any immediate accessibility concerns will be addressed as a priority based on funding and resources.
- A site meeting was held in July and PSPC indicated that based on the current use of the site and that it is an inactive cemetery, the current conditions are acceptable. All persons can fully access the site and tour the grounds. All access points are fully paved with the asphalt in good condition and does not require any repairs. We are also completing some horticultural based work in removing potential issues with some of the tree growth along the roadways, near the benches etc. We will be installing additional signage at the site to assist with navigation but this is based upon what will be identified in the final report.
  - The final report for the first thirteen assessments overseas was received and its observations have been assessed against current projects and is being incorporated into future project planning.
- Any barriers identified through CGMM are added to our short-, medium- and long-term infrastructure plans for our cemeteries.
- Commemoration continues to proactively assess potential accessibility barriers on all project and events. The Chapel at Veterans Cemetery is fully accessible with installation of an access ramp and relocation of the stairwell completed as of 17 April 2024. Final review of construction will be completed by PSPC before the end of April 2024.
- Once an accessibility barrier is identified for overseas sites, it is added to the International Operations (IO) cell projects file. As accessibility is considered in all projects, new barriers are actioned in the same manner.
- The goal is to complete 100% of the site assessments by July 2025; performance measurement is based on number of completed site assessments.
- Identified accessible upgrades for Veterans Cemetery have been completed except for the brick pathway within the Forest Garden area. This was delayed slightly due to infrastructure work (drainage, ground leveling etc.) that was identified during the initial planning stages of the pathway project, as well as available funding for fiscal year 2023-2024. This will be completed by 31 March 2025.
- For Commemorative Sites outside of Canada (overseas) the observations contained within the site assessments, as well as the established practice of ensuring that accessibility is considered in all projects and activities, ensures that projects and activities will continue beyond the current planning and reporting cycle. This is evident in some current long-term projects such as the resurfacing of a 500m trail and the

rehabilitation of a major parking lot at the [Canadian National Vimy Memorial](#), as well as the redevelopment of the [Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Memorial](#) permanent exhibit. For CGMM, additional accessible parking identified in the assessment for Veterans Cemetery will be addressed over the coming fiscal years based on funding and resources. VAC has already had initial discussions with [National Defence](#) to lease a small portion of land approximately 100m from the cemetery entrance. In the interim, VAC continues to work with PSPC to determine if an accessible parking spot can be identified on the cemetery grounds. There is potential for 1-2 spots that can be used. Further review is underway.

### **2.3 Information and communication technologies (ICT)**

#### **Desired outcome:**

- Veterans Affairs Canada's information and communication technology is useable 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: completed**

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

#### **Action #2 for ICT barrier #1: completed**

- Implement a more accessible version of Microsoft Dynamics CRM and migrate the GCcase functionality to it.

#### Implementation:

Implement a more accessible version of Microsoft Dynamics CRM at VAC and migrate current systems to the new platforms.

In the Progress Report 2023 we combined GCcase and CSDN under old client systems. However, migration covers only the implementation of the new CRM and the migration of the GCcase systems to CRM. It does not include replacing CSDN. We're creating a separate action item to distinguish these two streams of work. (Action wording revised)

- **Completed by:** December 2024 (Implementation only)
- **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch and SD Branch
- **Status:** Complete

We completed the remaining steps to implement the new system:

- from GCcase version 9.1 to Microsoft Dynamics CRM
- to the cloud version of CRM

#### Migration:

We migrated all GCcase functionality to the new CRM.

#### **Action #3 for ICT barrier #1(new): in progress**

- Modernize Disability and Financial Benefits currently in CSDN, beginning with allowances (includes accessibility conformance.)
- In Phase 1 of the project we'll modernize 10 CSDN components, making them available in our Client Service Application (CSA). CSA is a modern Angular web application with some web components in CRM.

Note: Phase 1 extends into the next accessibility planning and reporting cycle.

1. [Clothing allowance](#)
2. [Attendance allowance](#)
3. [Exceptional Incapacity Allowance](#)
4. Pain and Suffering Compensation - 1st application Medical Condition Consequential Claims
5. Disability Pension - 1st application Medical Condition Consequential Claims
6. [Income Replacement Benefit](#)
7. Pain and Suffering Compensation - Election
8. Pain and Suffering Compensation - Cash Out
9. [Public Service Health Care Plan](#)
10. [Veterans Emergency Fund](#)

Per the IT Modernization project, we aim to complete 100% of the functionality needed to support all these benefits by March 2026. A small portion of this work will continue into the

next accessibility planning cycle. Phase II of the project will include replacing more of CSDN; this will also fall into the next planning cycle.

- **Completed by:** December 2025
- **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch and SD Branch
- **Status:** In progress

Essential core framework pieces required to move the first allowance, the Clothing Allowance, to the CSA are in place.

#### **Action #4 for ICT barrier #1 (new): completed**

- Design an accessibility framework for the IT Modernization project to ensure accessibility is included from the start and throughout, that our new solutions conform to [EN 301 549](#) on release, that metrics are consistent across development teams, and that people with disabilities are included as stakeholders.
  - **Completed by:** June 2024
  - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch and SD Branch
  - **Status:** Completed

We completed the design of the framework. It includes:

- Customized training and information sessions for each role involved in the project. These roles include development team leads, project and change managers, developers, and management.
- A core accessibility testing framework that includes best-practice methodologies, tools, metrics, and automation.

The addition of the Accessibility Network as a key stakeholder in the project, supporting the “[Nothing without Us](#)” principle. The Network guides the Department as it works to become accessible and inclusive. It enables the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers by providing input based on the lived experiences of persons with disabilities. (Accessibility@VAC intranet site).

#### **Action #5 (new) for ICT barrier #1: completed**

- Implement the framework across all teams working on user interfaces for the new solutions.
  - **Completed by:** December 2024
  - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch and SD Branch

- **Status:** Completed

We have implemented the framework:

- A representative of the VAC Accessibility Network has been identified. They will attend stakeholder meetings and receive project communications. They'll act as liaison between the project and the Network, so that people with disabilities are included in throughout the project.
- We have provided information sessions and training customized to each role in the project.
- Development teams are following the accessibility standards during development, testing each increment, and fixing issues prior to release (or have a roadmap to fix them shortly afterwards).

### 2.3.2 ICT barrier #2:

- Some web-based applications are not fully accessible. For instance, [MyVAC Account](#) is not fully compliant with EN 301 549. 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: in progress

- Bring My VAC Account into compliance with EN 301 549.
  - **Completed by:** December 2025
  - **Roles and Responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch and SD Branch
  - **Status:** In progress

Through operational development and testing, the My VAC Account development team has identified and corrected the majority of critical and serious accessibility issues and continues to address remaining issues in order of severity.

The centralized accessibility team has undertaken a quasi-independent accessibility audit against the EN 301 549 to uncover any accessibility issues not yet identified through operational development and testing.

#### Action #2 for ICT barrier #2: in progress

- Bring actively maintained web applications into compliance with EN 301 549 and apply the standard to any new features added to these applications.

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 do not need new features.)

- **Completed by:** December 2025
- **Roles and Responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch and SD Branch
- **Status:** In progress

We have conducted accessibility audits on approximately 85% of our public-facing applications (other than My VAC Account), and 50% of our internal-facing applications.

We continue to:

1. conduct accessibility audits of these web applications
2. ensure teams receive training and tools
3. build accessibility into the start of new applications

### **Action #3 for ICT barrier #2: not yet started**

- Bring 25% of other web applications (for example, applications that are stable and not being updated with new functionality at this time) into compliance with EN 301 549. 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 and SD Branch
  - **Status:** Not yet started

This item may be carried forward to the next planning and reporting cycle. The priority is IT Modernization and resources are dedicated to that work. The likelihood of these other applications being in scope for IT Modernization increases as time goes by.

### **2.3.3 ICT barrier #3a: (wording revised)**

- Client-facing letters  
Client-facing letters produced from our client systems are not fully accessible. Client-facing letters converted to Portable Document Format (PDF) in VAC's systems can have accessibility issues, especially with screen readers.

### **Action #1 for ICT barrier #3a: completed**

- Determine the nature and scope of accessibility barriers within client-facing letters (Microsoft Word and PDF).
- Determine a method to bring these into conformance with EN 301 549.

- **Completed by:** December 2023
- **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch and SD Branch
- **Status:** Completed

VAC's analysis of existing letters found that the only thing preventing these Word documents from being fully accessible is related to how fonts are embedded.  
 Note: We cannot guarantee full conformance to EN 301 549 for PDF versions of the letters. This barrier is not limited to VAC.

**Action #2 for ICT barrier #3a: completed**

- Conduct accessibility assessments on any new letter templates as they are being created or updated and identify solutions.
  - **Completed by:** December 2023
  - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch and SD Branch
  - **Status:** Completed

VAC completed its assessment against the EN 301 549 of:

- the Letter Assistant letter-writing web tool
- the Word Automated Letter Template used for all letters
- the PDF version of the client letter generated by the tool

We found accessibility issues in all three components.

**Action #3 for ICT barrier #3a: completed**

- Bring 25% of client-facing letters into conformance with EN 301 549.
  - **Completed by:** December 2025
  - **Roles and Responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch and SD Branch
  - **Status:** Completed

We corrected the issues found in:

- the letter-writing tool
- the Word letter template used for all letters
- the PDF version of the client letter generated by the tool

Note: We cannot guarantee full conformance to EN 301 549 for PDF versions of the letters. This barrier is not limited to VAC. We have, however, fixed all issues in the PDF found by the automated accessibility checker in Foxit PDF Editor.



VAC will continue to include accessibility in design and development cycles to maintain compliance with the standard and future versions of it.

### **2.3.3 ICT barrier #3b: (wording revised)**

- Client-facing forms  
Client-facing forms are not fully accessible. Client-facing forms converted to PDF in VAC's systems can have accessibility issues, especially with screen readers.

#### **Action #1 for ICT barrier #3b: in progress**

- Determine the nature and scope of accessibility barriers within client-facing forms (PDF).
- Determine a method to bring these into conformance with EN 301 549.
  - **Completed by:** ~~December 2023~~ **Revised:** December 2025
  - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch and SD Branch
  - **Status:** In progress

Reason for revision of target date:

We have separated (Adobe PDF) client-facing forms into its own action item because it will take longer to complete than the letters work; there are additional challenges with PDF. We have run a few client-facing forms through automated accessibility checks and found issues. We have not conducted full manual testing, which is expected to reveal additional issues, especially in complex forms.

We have had discussions with ICT accessibility experts from several Government organizations. They have cautioned that it will be difficult to achieve 100% conformance to EN 301 549 in PDF forms.

We will conduct further analysis to determine how to address accessibility in forms with our available capacity. This work will continue into the next reporting year.

#### **Action #2 for ICT barrier #3b: in progress**

- Conduct accessibility assessments against EN 301 549.
  - **Completed by:** ~~December 2023~~ **Revised:** December 2025
  - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch and SD Branch
  - **Status:** In progress

Reason for revision of target date:

We have separated (Adobe PDF) client-facing forms into its own action item because it will take longer to complete than the letters work; there are additional challenges with PDF. 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 EN 301 549). VAC continues to work on solutions for these.

We have run a few client-facing forms through automated accessibility checks and found issues. We have done some limited manual testing but have not conducted full manual testing, which is expected to reveal additional issues, especially in complex forms.

### **Action #3 for ICT barrier #3b: not yet started**

- Bring client-facing forms into conformance with EN 301 549.
  - **Completed by:** ~~December 2023~~ **Revised:** December 2025
  - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch and SD Branch
  - **Status:** Not yet started

Reason for revision of target date:

We have separated (Adobe PDF) client-facing forms into its own action item because it will take longer to complete than the letters work; there are additional challenges with PDF.

### **2.3.3 ICT barrier #3c: (wording revised)**

- Scanned client documents are not fully accessible.

This barrier is limited to the scanned paper forms and supporting documents that clients mail to us. Workers at our mail-scanning facility convert the mailed-in documents to PDF, add metadata, and upload them to the client's digital file.

### **Action #1 for ICT barrier #3c: completed**

- Determine the nature and scope of accessibility barriers within scanned client documents in VAC's systems.
  - **Completed by:** ~~December 2023~~ **Revised:** December 2024
  - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch and SD Branch
  - **Status:** Completed

We conducted a preliminary analysis of our scanned images and their metadata. Screen reader users will not be able to read them, and screen magnifier users may see loss of image quality.

## Action #2 for ICT barrier #3c: in progress

- Determine options to bring scanned client documents into an accessible state, and which of these would be in scope for this work, for example, historical versus new.
  - **Completed by:** ~~December 2023~~ **Revised:** December 2025
  - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch and SD Branch
  - **Status:** In progress

Reason for revision of target date:

We do not have sufficient capacity to complete this item in the original time frame.

### A note on computer vision:

VAC has developed an automated search tool that assists VAC adjudicators in processing disability applications.

The tool leverages [Azure AI Vision](#) to identify relevant supporting documents on a client's file. The tool submits documents to the Azure computer vision service, which uses Optical Character Recognition to scan the documents and convert handwriting to text. The search tool implements a text search on the text generating a PDF bundle of relevant pages. Adjudicator time is saved by only referencing relevant client information pertaining to the client's condition being claimed.

At time of writing, the tool does not provide the VAC employee with a text alternative of the document. If it's a scanned image of a doctor's hand-written note, for example, it will not be readable by a screen reader.

In future planning cycles, we could explore using computer vision to remove barriers in scanned client documents.

### 2.3.4 ICT barrier #4:

- Data analytics dashboards and reports are not fully accessible.

## Action #1 for ICT barrier #4: in progress

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

VAC has identified affected analytics dashboards. Dashboards are interactive visualizations. Users can see high-level data at a glance and select different key data to view detailed reports. Dashboards do not conform to the accessibility standard unless they have alternative, accessible versions.

We are now releasing each dashboard with alternative accessible versions of key reports. We'll provide accessible versions of other dashboard reports on request.

VAC is implementing a new reporting portal. This will allow us to publish dashboards and accessible versions of reports in the same area. Navigation of the new portal will be accessible.

We had to delay implementing the new reporting portal due to some fixes required by the vendor, but we do not expect this to impact the original target date.

We have not changed any tracking or performance indicators.

### **2.3.5 ICT barrier #5:**

- Not all public-facing mobile applications are fully accessible (for example, [Post-traumatic Stress Disorder \(PTSD\) Coach Canada](#) and Veterans Matter mobile applications).

Note that VAC now has only one mobile application: PTSD Coach Canada

### **Action #1 for ICT barrier #5: in progress**

- Perform accessibility assessments and fix issues in this public-facing mobile application.
  - **Completed by:** December 2025
  - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch, SD Branch, Health Services
  - **Status:** In progress

This assessment was completed in 2024 and included:

- text-to-speech functionality
- options to adjust font sizes in the app or compatibility with device font size settings
- subtitles for audio content
- options to adjust audio volume within the app
- help features throughout the app, indicated by clear, universally recognized icons

Fixing the usability and accessibility issues found will continue into the next reporting year. The version of PTSD Coach Canada, released in April 2024, contains an accessibility statement and a link to the Veterans Affairs Canada accessibility feedback page. The statement reads:

"Have you encountered an accessibility issue in PTSD Coach Canada? Let us know on our VAC Accessibility Feedback page."

Correction to Progress Report 2023:

We did not conduct the accessibility audit against EN 301 549.

### **2.3.6 ICT barrier #6:**

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

#### **Action #1 for ICT barrier #6: in progress**

- Conduct accessibility audits to identify fixes on internal desktop software and take action as appropriate (upgrade or replace).
  - **Completed by:** ~~December 2024~~ **Revised:** December 2025
  - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch
  - **Status:** In progress

VAC is currently working with SSC's 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 a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for all VAC employees to view.

### **2.3.7 ICT barrier #7: (new barrier added)**

- SharePoint and PowerApps products enable more people outside of IT to develop tools that support their business processes. They are, in fact, ICT products and need to conform to EN 301 549.

#### **Action #1 for ICT barrier #7: not yet started**

- Provide VAC-wide governance to require and guide people developing tools in SharePoint and PowerApps to include accessibility from the start and adhere to EN 301 459 as much as these platforms currently allow.
  - **Completed by:** December 2025
  - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch
  - **Status:** Not yet started

### 2.3.8 ICT barrier #8: (new barrier added)

- This barrier is limited to the Application Management Division (AMD).

AMD builds client systems in-house. Its product and project documents, for example project roadmaps, have not conformed to EN 301 549 in the past.

#### Action #1 for ICT barrier #8: completed

- Promote awareness of the importance of accessible documents within our directorate and within the VAC projects we support, with a focus on impact to users.
  - **Completed by:** December 2024
  - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch
  - **Status:** Completed

AMD has been promoting awareness of document accessibility, with a focus on impact to users, through working groups, projects, and posts to internal communications channels. These activities will continue as part of our normal operations and business processes.

#### Action #2 for ICT barrier #8: completed

- Provide training and/or reference materials to the AMD.
  - **Completed by:** December 2024
  - **Roles and responsibilities:** CFOCS Branch
  - **Status:** Completed

Tracking: VAC's AMD Accessibility Progress Tool.

We have hosted a few learning sessions on Word and PowerPoint accessibility, and we direct people to [How to create accessible documents in Microsoft 365 - Digital Accessibility Toolkit](#) for continued self-directed learning.

### 2.3.9 ICT barrier #9:

- 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 #9: completed

- 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, 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 Shared Services Canada’s AACT Team.

**2.3.10 ICT barrier #10:**

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

**Action #1 for ICT barrier #10: in progress**

- 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 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

We are currently reviewing our procurement process and how best we can evaluate new software and hardware requests. We are currently working with SSC’s Accessibility Working Group to come up with audit procedures and a scorecard on how to be able to review and audit desktop software and hardware to determine if it meets accessibility criteria or not.

**2.3.11 ICT barrier #11:**

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

### **Action #1 for ICT barrier #11: in progress**

- 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

Most Accessibility items that are used in M365 are covered in the Training Portal. We have also been using these tools to ensure our documents and videos are as accessible as possible. We have had Tech Talks to bring awareness to the features on how others can make their material more accessible.

### **2.3.12 ICT barrier #12:**

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

### **Action #1 for ICT barrier #12: completed**

- 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. IT Training creates documentation and offers training via Tech Talks about accessibility. These topics include, how to create accessible documents in different applications, accessibility software options and how to use accessibility features on various software. We will schedule regular Tech Talks regarding accessibility to ensure new features are being shared.

### **2.3.13 ICT barrier #13 :**

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

### **Action #1 for ICT barrier #13: in progress**



- Identify options to provide in-home set-up of IT equipment for persons with disabilities.
  - **Completed by:** ~~December 2023~~ **Revised:** June 2024  
(Action is pending further discussion with AACT 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 SSC's AACT 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:
  - number of requests for in-home services
  - number of requests fulfilled, who fulfilled in-home service request
- Target: 100%

#### **2.3.14 ICT barrier #14:**

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

#### **Action #1 for ICT barrier #14: in progress**

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

We are currently focused on configuring the Development environment for ATIPXpress, our new ATIP solution. ATIPXpress is a tool that combines different tasks like handling requests, finding records, redacting sensitive information, and ensuring compliance into one system. It makes managing these tasks faster by automating them. Following its completion, we will proceed with implementing the Production environment. This involves preparing production servers, installing software components, configuring the production environment and conducting thorough software testing.

#### **2.3.15 ICT barrier #15:**

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

**Action #1 for ICT barrier #15: completed**

- VAC and SSC to implement an accessible telephone line (for example, 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 \(ATIP\) | Veterans Affairs Canada](#).

**2.4 Communication (other than information and communication technologies)**

**Desired outcomes:**

- VAC staff are equipped to design and deliver communications that are accessible to person 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: in progress**

- Develop accessibility-related references and tools for VAC-led commemorative events in Canada and abroad.
- In all International Operations Directorate events 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 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 Survey 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. This will continue to be an on-going project with improving accessibility.
  - **Completed by:** December 2025
  - **Roles and Responsibilities:** CPA Branch
  - **Status:** In progress

#### **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: in progress**

- 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

In progress for Vimy. Beaumont-Hamel exhibits are due to be replaced in 2025-2026, likely in the fall. Any work that is going to be done moving forward they will take into account accessibility in the planning phase.

### **2.5 The procurement of goods, services and facilities**

#### **Desired outcome:**

- All goods and services procured by VAC 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: in progress**

- 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 2024~~ **Revised:** June 2025  
(This timeline was extended because the Government of Canada (GoC) 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. This is complete and will be ongoing. We have achieved this and continue to deliver procurement information sessions on various topics, which include the highlighting VAC's obligation to make accessibility considerations and incorporate accessibility requirements into contracts. The procurement unit provided two information sessions, one in the fall and one in the winter of FY 2023-2024 through the VAC Manager's Network.

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

The GoC has adopted 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. PSPC Procurement's standard Bid (RFx) templates also include accessibility compliance requirements. VAC has adopted GoC accessibility standards and ensures that they are incorporated into all contracts for all new procurements for third party software.

- Indicator: % of procurement activities in which the established GoC ICT standards for third party built software are considered
- Target: 100% complete June 2025 – In progress
- Source: Accessibility Consideration Indicator in VAC's Systems Applications and Products in Data Processing (SAP)

Accessibility considerations are included for all contracts for the acquisition of furniture and supplies. The GoC 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 GoC Workplace Fit-up Standard and the GCworkplace Design Guide. The GCworkplace Design Guide has been developed as the companion document to the GoC Workplace Fit-up Standards and is mandatory for all planning and design of general-purpose office space. Once PSPC establishes Accessibility standards for all furniture those standards will be adopted by VAC.

- 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 - Complete
- 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:**

- VAC 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: completed**

- 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

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

- Direct client communication initiated by the 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: completed**

- Make the application steps clear, concise and easy to understand and provide better support material. This will be achieved through:
  - 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:** June 2023
    - **Roles and Responsibilities:** Bureau of Pensions Advocates (BPA)
    - **Status:** Complete

### **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 #1 for the design and delivery of programs and services barrier #3: in progress**

- 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.
  - Reviewing application and communications material to ensure they meet applicants' needs.
    - **Completed by:** ~~June 2024~~ **Revised:** June 2025
    - **Roles and Responsibilities:** SD Branch with support from CPA Branch
    - **Status:** In progress

Consulting on how to improve the online application in My VAC Account/Reviewing the application (complete). VAC's Innovation Hub reviewed the [PEN923](#) and reached out to subject matter experts to discuss potential options that could be utilized to update and improve the application.

Reviewing communication material (complete). Issues Management reviewed and updated the articles relating to Disability Benefits, in consultation with Disability Benefits

Program Management. The updates were made to ensure that the reader clearly understands what is required and what we do with the information. The updates were posted on our external site on May 12.

Reviewing/updates to the application (In progress). The current status is in progress, with an anticipated implementation date before the end of June 2025. Further amendments to the PEN923 were required in order to align with work being completed on two key disability benefit decision-making tools, the [Entitlement Eligibility Guidelines](#) and the [Table of Disabilities](#). These amendments will be finalized by the Centralized Operations Division by end of October 2024, followed by the development work related to My VAC Account, Forms Management, and GCCase & Integration teams to meet the January target implementation date.

#### **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: completed**

- 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:** Completed

Disability Benefits Program Management has created a straightforward process for team members to follow when updating or creating decision letters. The process has four stages, including research, review and feedback, approval of final draft and implementation. The goal is to ensure any new or updated decision letters are written in plain language, using accessible format, under the [Gender Based Analysis Plus](#) (GBA Plus) lens. The approval process can be considered complete and is now being used consistently in letters regarding disability benefits.

#### **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: completed**

- 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.
  - **Completed by:** June 2023
  - **Roles and responsibilities:** Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance (SPPP) Branch
  - **Status:** Completed

## **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: completed**

- Extend and update the Disability Lens Guidelines and VAC's Policy and Development Manual using feedback received through the fall [2021 Let's Talk Veterans consultations on accessibility](#).
  - **Completed by:** June 2024
  - **Roles and Responsibilities:** SPPP Branch
  - **Status:** Completed

## **2.7 Transportation**

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

## **2.8 Organizational culture**

### **Desired outcome:**

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

VAC's Accessibility Action Plan 2022-2025 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
- celebrate accessibility-related events to increase education and awareness

## **Progress on VAC’s accessibility culture shift in 2024**

### **VAC’s accessibility employee survey**

The yearly survey helps the Department measure how VAC is becoming more accessibility-confident. From April 22 - May 10, 2024, a total of 796 employees (20.9%) completed VAC’s Employee Accessibility Survey. In 2023, 113 employees responded to this survey. The increase in respondents shows an increase in awareness.

This year, the respondents noted progress in areas such as:

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

Feedback from this survey will shape VAC’s Accessibility Action Plan 2025-2028, future progress reports, and strategies to improve the Department’s accessibility culture.

### **Updates to VAC’s Accessibility@VAC intranet site**

In 2023-2024, the content on the Accessibility@VAC intranet site was regularly updated to provide employees with the most recent information, resources, and updates from the Accessibility Network. For example, the site was updated to include more than 40 resources and learning opportunities from various partners.

The “Accessibility Storytellers” and “Accessibility Adopters” series continue to be a key feature of the site. VAC’s Accessibility Storytellers series showcases lived experience from VAC employees with disabilities and their allies and the Accessibility Adopters series celebrates employees who prioritize accessibility into their work at VAC.

## **Promotion of accessibility learning opportunities offered by other organizations**

Part of VAC's culture shift strategy is creating content that sparks discussion on accessibility.

Accessibility learning sessions continue to be promoted. Examples includes:

- GoC Accessibility Training and Learning:
  - document accessibility workshops
  - overview of accessibility features on smartphones and adaptive technology in the workplace
  - essentials for GC managers and human resources professionals: Best practices in accessibility, workplace adjustments and job accommodation
- Plain Language: a clear voice for Canada (GoC Plain Language Community of Practice)
- The [Canadian Congress on Disability Inclusion](#)

In 2024 we internally promoted events and sessions offered by: [Employment and Social Development Canada](#), [Health Canada](#), CSPS, the [Canadian Accessibility Network](#), [Accessibility Standards Canada](#), SSC, PSPC, and the Office of Public Service Accessibility.

## **Accessibility-related content provided to program areas**

In 2024, VAC's Accessibility Readiness Team contacted program areas/divisions to increase interest in receiving accessibility content for distribution to their employees.

## **Accessibility-related events and presentations**

During [National AccessAbility Week 2024 \(NAAW\)](#), the Accessibility Network and the VAC Accessibility Readiness Team hosted a fireside chat and accessibility panel discussion called "Fostering accessibility culture." The event was a great success, with two panelists from the Accessibility Network, two employees from the Disability Management Unit, and 624 employees in attendance.

## **Promotion of International Day of Persons with Disabilities and National AccessAbility Week**

VAC promoted International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) 2023 with a Carillon series (online newsletter) called "A Day in the Life," where Accessibility Network members shared their day-to-day experiences. These initiatives were promoted through the Accessibility Champion's messages to all staff, the accessibility resources section on Accessibility@VAC intranet site, MS Teams posts, and the Friday Highlights, VAC's e-newsletter.

During NAAW 2024, the Accessibility Network hosted a fireside chat and panel discussion with VAC's Champion of Accessibility. The GoC hosted a public service-wide event called, "Brave Conversations and Bold Actions When Building Accessible and Inclusive Workplaces." These activities, and other accessibility resources, were promoted through an email to all staff from the Accessibility Champion, MS Teams postings, articles in VAC's internal online newsletter Carillon, and the Friday Highlights e-newsletter.

VAC remains committed to growing the Department's accessibility learning and awareness.

### **3. Consultations**

Persons with disabilities were consulted in the preparation of this Progress Report 2024.

#### **3.1 Internal consultations**

In 2024, VAC consulted the Accessibility Network on several initiatives, including:

- developing a strategic plan for future accessibility initiatives within the Network
- participating in a Restorative Engagement Questionnaire for Networks and Organizations issued by the [Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat](#) (TBS)
- reviewing the format of VAC's Accessibility Progress Report 2023
- conducting user-testing for the 2024 Employee Accessibility Survey
- developing a more accessible form for interdisciplinary clinics to become registered providers for VAC under Federal Health Claim Processing Services
- reviewing draft cover pages for the Accessibility Progress Report 2024

These internal consultations have provided valuable insights and highlighted the ongoing need for a cultural shift towards accessibility at VAC. We look forward to finding opportunities for improvement as a more accessibility-confident organization.

#### **3.2 External consultations**

Veteran members of VAC's [Ministerial Advisory Groups](#) were invited to participate in a virtual Veterans roundtable on accessibility, which helped inform this progress report and the upcoming Accessibility Action Plan 2025-2028. On 15 May 2024, participants were invited to provide feedback on VAC's Accessibility Action Plan 2022-2025 and VAC's Accessibility Progress Report 2023.

Veterans were asked to identify accessibility barriers they may face when interacting with the Department and provide suggestions on how to remove and prevent them. Those barriers could be physical and/or architectural, technological, information and communications, attitudinal, or systemic. Participants also provided feedback on the

language and format of the Accessibility Action Plan 2022-2025 and Accessibility Progress Report 2023.

The virtual roundtable was valuable to obtain feedback on accessibility. For example, participants said they felt a need for more plain and accessible communication from VAC.

Some feedback received goes beyond the scope of VAC's work to identify, prevent, and remove accessibility barriers. All feedback was shared with the appropriate areas of VAC to inform the development of VAC's Accessibility Action Plan 2025-2028.

#### **4. Feedback**

In December 2022, the Department published its Accessibility Action Plan 2022-2025, creating four ways employees and members of the public could provide accessibility-related feedback: mail, email, telephone, and an anonymous online form.

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

At the time of this Progress Report 2024's publication, VAC had received 63 pieces of feedback. The primary method by which VAC received feedback was email (35 pieces of feedback), followed by its anonymous online feedback form (28 pieces of feedback). VAC received no feedback by telephone or by letter mail.

Of the 63 pieces of feedback received, 43 went beyond the scope of VAC's work to identify, remove, and prevent accessibility barriers. With the consent of the individual who provided it, this feedback was shared with the appropriate area within the Department.

20 pieces of feedback received were within the scope of VAC's work to remove and prevent accessibility barriers. This feedback can be further broken down into three themes:

1. external accessibility barriers (barriers faced by Veterans and their families),
2. internal accessibility barriers (barriers faced by VAC employees),
3. communication barriers (for example, inaccessible fonts).

Ten pieces were external to the Department, four were internal to the Department and six were specifically related to accessible forms, font, and text size.

##### **4.1 External Accessibility Barriers**

- Feedback: Difficulty accessing emails through My VAC Account.
  - The My VAC Account team will continue to include accessibility and usability in

design and development cycles to conform with current and future versions of the standard (WCAG 2.1 Level AA as referenced in EN 301 549). This barrier and its action items are included in VAC's Accessibility Action Plan 2022-2025.

- Feedback: The two-factor authentication application for My VAC Account has a time out of 30 seconds, causing issues for Veterans who use voice controls.
  - This feedback was shared with IT Accessibility who took note of the accessibility barrier. The My VAC Account Support Team contacted the Veteran and helped them log in with the email verification code option, which has a time limit of 20 minutes.
  
- Feedback: Two additional pieces of feedback address a difficulty accessing My VAC Account due to the two-factor authentication.
  - This barrier and actions items are being addressed and will be included in VAC's Accessibility Action Plan 2025-2028.
  
- Feedback: The general VAC phone number does not give clients the opportunity to use voice controls to navigate the call, posing an issue for clients who rely on voice controls.
  - In response to this feedback, VAC IT Accessibility created an internal work item. This barrier and action items are being addressed and will be included in VAC's Accessibility Action Plan 2025-2028.
  
- Feedback: Four pieces of feedback address a difficulty in accessing My VAC Account.
  - The My VAC Account team will continue to include accessibility and usability in design and development cycles to conform with current and future versions of the standard (WCAG 2.1 Level AA as referenced in EN 301 549). This barrier and action items are included in VAC's Accessibility Action Plan 2022-2025.
  
- Feedback: Difficulty attaching documents through My VAC Account.
  - In response to this feedback, My VAC Account Support analysts provided a preliminary investigation. The feedback was sent to Issues Resolution and National Contact Centre Network for tracking and response.

#### **4.2 Internal Accessibility Barriers**

- Feedback: The mandatory VAC accessibility training lacks clarity.
  - VAC's Accessibility Readiness Team confirmed that "Addressing Disability Inclusion and Barriers to Accessibility" is mandatory for all employees, while the "Disability Management and Workplace Wellness" course is mandatory for managers. These courses are available through the Canadian School of Public Service.

- Feedback: Presentations on document accessibility would be beneficial.
  - In response to this feedback, VAC's Accessibility Readiness Team shared information on a Documents Training Workshop hosted by SSC. Additional resources on how to make accessible documents and why they are important was also provided.
- Feedback: Seeking information on the self-identification process for equity seeking employees.
  - In response to this feedback, VAC's Accessibility Readiness Team shared resources for self-declaring as a person with a disability, self-declaring for GoC jobs and Workplace Accessibility Passport. It was also noted that self-identifying as a person in an equity seeking community is voluntary.
- Feedback: A VAC employee indicated that fire alarm drills are not accessible for Deaf and hard of hearing employees.
  - In response to this feedback, VAC is reviewing and considering its responsibilities to meet all necessary building codes, safety regulations, and accessibility standards.

#### **4.3 Communication Barriers**

- Feedback: VAC Forms cannot be opened in Edge/Chrome browsers or on a mobile device.
  - This barrier and action items (for example, developing accessible forms) are being addressed and will be included in VAC's Accessibility Action Plan 2025-2028.
- Feedback: The VAC Security Screening and Consent Form is not accessible to an employee using a screen reader.
  - VAC's IT Accessibility Team did an accessibility assessment on the TBS form and found accessibility barriers with the PDF, especially for people using screen readers (tagging issues). The team reported the barrier to TBS and advised VAC Security Services Team. A Security Team member worked directly with the employee to complete the survey form.
- Feedback: Adobe Acrobat Reader is not a free service and is needed for many VAC forms.
  - This barrier and action items (developing accessible forms) are being addressed and will be included in VAC's Accessibility Action Plan 2025-2028.
- Feedback: A VAC employee requested information on larger print forms on behalf of a Veteran.

- In response to this feedback, information on recommended accessible font size and format were shared. Contact information for the VAC's National IT Service Desk and Forms Management were also included.
- Feedback: Seeking information on high quality alternative text for hand-drawn infographic diagrams.
  - VAC's Accessibility Readiness Team shared tools on generating accessible alt text and accessible imaging.
- Feedback: Seeking information on accessible signage.
  - In response to this feedback, VAC's Accessibility Readiness Team shared the GoC's Office of Public Service Accessibility guidelines on making communications products and activities accessible.

## **5. What we have learned**

Now that VAC has completed the first cycle of accessibility reporting with the Accessibility Action Plan and two Progress Reports, we have seen considerable progress with the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers across the Department.

VAC remains committed to accessibility confidence. Embracing accessibility ensures that every individual, regardless of their abilities, can thrive and contribute effectively. The Department is cultivating a culture of equity and respect by engaging employees and clients in providing feedback and having meaningful discussions about how to improve.

By being proactive with training, education, awareness, and open discussions, we help to foster a supportive community for both staff and clients. VAC is aware that it isn't just about meeting the minimum requirements, it's about exceeding those standards to drive success and create an environment where everyone feels valued.

## **6. Training**

VAC's Accessibility Action Plan 2022-2025 introduced the following mandatory courses from the CSPS:

- Addressing Disability Inclusion and Identifying Barriers to Accessibility (for all staff).
- Disability Management and Workplace Wellness (for managers).

In 2024 students, employees, and managers, from nearly every branch of the Department have helped VAC towards its goal by participating in these courses. We continue to work towards ensuring all VAC staff have completed these courses. This work is ongoing, and we will continue to promote their completion through the use of performance agreements and the onboarding processes.

In addition to the mandatory training courses, many accessibility-related learning and training opportunities available to VAC employees. VAC continues to promote other training activities from the CSPS and other partners. At the time of publication, we noted more than 20 CSPS Accessibility training activities that employees can participate in (courses, videos, articles). VAC is committed to continue promoting the various Accessibility related training opportunities through its Accessibility@VAC intranet page, as well as through other media (emails to staff, MS Teams posts).

## 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 at VAC** - 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 helps 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](#)).

**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](#)).

**Duty to Accommodate** - 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).

**EN 301 549** - 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.

**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. (Source: [Gender-Based Analysis Plus | Veterans Affairs Canada](#))

**Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport** - The GC Workplace Accessibility Passport (the Passport) helps federal public service employees get the tools, supports, and measures they need to perform at their best and succeed in the workplace. It facilitates recruitment, retention, and career advancement for persons with disabilities. (Source: [Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport - Canada.ca](#))

**Plain language** - According to the [International Plain Language Federation](#), “Communication is in plain language if its wording, structure, and design are so clear that the intended readers can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use that information.”

The purpose of a plain-language approach in written communications is to convey information that the audience needs to know in a way that they can easily understand. It should not be confused with an oversimplified, condescending style. Rather, you can save your audience time and effort by using well-known and proven techniques. (Source: [Plain language, accessibility, and inclusive communications - Privy Council Office - Canada.ca](#))

**Screen reader** - A software that reads the text on a computer screen in a computerized voice, and it can also convert the text into braille. This software is commonly used by people who are blind or have sight loss. The information on screen must be formatted properly (in a structured electronic file) for the screen reader to recognize it. (Source: [Tools to make information accessible](#)).

**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](#)** (CPA) – 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.

**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.

**Ministerial Advisory Groups** - Six ministerial advisory groups have been created to improve transparency and seek consultation on issues of importance to Veterans and their families. Each advisory group has a chairperson appointed by the membership from among the members and a senior departmental official from Veterans Affairs Canada co-chairs. A representative of the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman is invited to attend Advisory Group meetings as an observer.

**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.

**PEN923** – VAC form used to apply for Disability Benefits (Pain and Suffering Compensation/Disability Pension).

**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](#)** (SPPP) – 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 develops 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](#).

**Central Agencies** - To exercise their authority, the Prime Minister and the Cabinet are supported both by departments and by three central agencies: the Privy Council Office, the Treasury Board Secretariat, and the Department of Finance. Together, these central agencies contribute to the successful formulation and implementation of government policies and programs.

**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 (for example, 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). 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.