



Veterans Review and Tribunal des anciens combattants  
Appeal Board Canada (révision et appel) Canada



# Strategic Plan 2010-2015

Veterans Review and Appeal Board

Canada

## Chair's Message

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It is my pleasure to share with you the Strategic Plan for the Veterans Review and Appeal Board for 2010 to 2015. As we look to the future, we remain focussed on fulfilling our mandate on behalf of traditional Veterans, Canadian Forces members and Veterans, Royal Canadian Mounted Police applicants and their families.

During the next five years, the Board will focus on effective operations and fair decision-making. We will manage fluctuating volumes of claims from applicants who have the right to appeal at any time if they are dissatisfied with a decision made by the Department of Veterans Affairs about their disability pension, disability award or War

Veterans Allowance claim. We will also make the process as efficient as possible by managing time lines within our control and working with representative organizations.

At the Board, we will support our Members and staff by providing them with training and tools to deal with an increasing volume of complex claims. We will strengthen our management practices and fulfill requirements for reporting and accountability. Finally, we will communicate regularly with applicants and Canadians about our program, our activities and our performance.

These priorities form the basis of the Board's strategic plan for the next five years. They are founded in our commitment to continually work to improve the program we offer to applicants.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John D. Larlee". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**John D. Larlee**  
Chair

## **Mandate**

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The Veterans Review and Appeal Board has full and exclusive jurisdiction to hear, determine and deal with all applications for review and appeal that may be made to the Board under the *Pension Act*, the *Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Act - Part 3*, the *War Veterans Allowance Act* and other Acts of Parliament. All matters related to appeals under this legislation are authorized under the *Veterans Review and Appeal Board Act*.

This Board also adjudicates duty-related disability pension applications under the authority of the *Royal Canadian Mounted Police Pension Continuation Act* and the *Royal Canadian Mounted Police Superannuation Act*.

## **Vision**

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To demonstrate fairness, competence and excellence in service to Canadians by providing independent, consistent and reasonable decisions that are grounded in law.

## **Mission**

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To ensure fairness in Canada's programs for disability pensions and awards and War Veterans Allowances by providing fair and timely appeals for traditional Veterans, Canadian Forces members and Veterans, Royal Canadian Mounted Police applicants, qualified civilians and their families.

## **Values**

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**Impartiality:** We value the contribution of all Canadians and provide accountable government services. We administer the law and our processes in an unbiased, fair and effective manner.

**Excellence:** We strive to provide excellence in service through continuous improvement of quality and ability.

**Integrity:** All individuals have the right to fair, transparent, and well-reasoned actions and decisions.

**Respect:** We work together in a spirit of collegiality and treat people with courtesy, diplomacy and respect.

**Balance:** We foster a workplace where individuals can sustain a healthy balance between their personal and professional lives.

## An Overview

The Veterans Review and Appeal Board (VRAB, the Board) is an independent tribunal established in 1995. The Board has full and exclusive jurisdiction to provide an appeal process for applicants who are not satisfied with a disability decision made by Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC, the Department). VRAB's strategic outcome is to provide fair and effective resolution of disability pension, disability award and War Veterans Allowance appeals from Canada's traditional Veterans, Canadian Forces members and Veterans, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) applicants, qualified civilians and their families. The Board's specialized program includes two levels of redress (review and appeal) for pension and award applications dealing with matters of entitlement and assessment and the final level of appeal for War Veterans Allowances.

## Current Realities

The Board's program is delivered by up to 29 permanent Members appointed by the Governor in Council and approximately 85 staff. Half of the Members work out of the Board's Head Office in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, and deal primarily with appeal hearings. The remaining Members are based in cities across Canada to accommodate applicants' requests for review hearings which are held in approximately 30 locations. The unique aspect of a review hearing is that it is the only time in the process when the applicant may appear in person before the decision-makers and testify about the facts of his or her case. The Board invests in technology to meet the needs of applicants and today offers the opportunity for hearings by teleconference or video conference to ensure a timely process. Through focussed management of time lines within its control, VRAB is reducing the wait time for applicants to have their hearings and receive their decisions.

The Board faces many challenges in delivering its program. It must manage fluctuating volumes of claims from applicants who have the right to appeal at any time if they are dissatisfied with a pension or award decision. It must also respond to increased demands for shorter wait times for hearings and decisions and fulfill additional reporting requirements from central agencies.

## Workload Trends

The Board's workload is determined by the number of applications for review and appeal brought forward by the Bureau of Pensions Advocates, Veterans' organizations and individuals. In forecasting work, the Board examines trends in the volume of disability pension and award decisions issued by VAC as well as its favourable rates. Both volumes and favourable rates fluctuate from year to year; however, they have

proven to be the best indicator of how many decisions have the potential to be appealed to the Board. Forecasting is complicated by the reality that there is no time limit to appeal a decision, and new evidence may be brought forward at each level of redress. Based on 2008-09 information and the trend in the number of claims registered with the Board, a volume of 5000 to 6000 decisions annually is predicted for 2009-10 and 2010-11. The Board has no backlog of pending claims and is in a good position to hear the majority of the claims that are ready to be scheduled within a three-month time period.

## An Evolving Applicant Profile

Canada's traditional Veterans, Canadian Forces members and Veterans, and RCMP applicants and their families have the right to appeal their disability decisions to the Board. A historical review of applicant profiles reflects the reality of a declining number of traditional Veterans and an increasing number of Canadian Forces members and Veterans. In 1997-98, 42% of applicants who received finalized decisions were traditional Veterans; 52% were Canadian Forces members and Veterans; and 6% were RCMP members. In 2008-09, 13.8% of applicants were traditional Veterans; 77.7% Canadian Forces members and Veterans; and 8.5% RCMP members. The expectation is that this trend will continue.

## Adapting to Change

The Board's program is evolving to include the adjudication of emerging case types such as Agent Orange, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and chemical exposure. It is also adapting to changes in legislation such as the introduction of the New Veterans Charter in 2006. In 2010 legislative changes will be implemented for Allied Veterans under the *War Veterans Allowance Act*. The creation of a Veterans Ombudsman and a Veterans Bill of Rights may assist the Board in identifying opportunities to further improve the quality of its service.

Another factor is the complex adjudicative environment. The Board is challenged to invest time in training for its Members who adjudicate complex claims while at the same time responding to increased expectations of applicants who want shorter wait times for hearings and decisions. The heightened interest in Veterans' and Canadian Forces' issues leads to increased information requests from Canadians, Parliamentary Committees and the media, and the need to provide meaningful information on the Board's mandate, program and redress process. As with any tribunal, the Board's goal is to maintain consistency and quality decisions in a fast-paced environment with a dynamic membership.

## Accountability and Public Service Renewal at the Board

Recently the Board was added to Schedule I-1 of the *Financial Administration Act* and anticipates significant impacts in terms of meeting additional accountability and reporting requirements of the Government of Canada.

The Board's Human Resources & Business Plan facilitates a strong, sustainable workforce to ensure a workplace that is fair, enabling, healthy and safe. Areas of focus in the coming years include employment equity, official languages, learning, recruitment and succession planning.

In support of its Members who adjudicate an increasing volume of emerging case types and complex claims, the Board provides specialized training, professional development opportunities, performance feedback and enhanced study tools and materials.

## Looking ahead to 2015

The Board will be fulfilling its mandate and providing solid and accountable public service management of its program and resources. To accomplish these goals, it will need to identify ways to improve its program, support its Members and employees in training and development and enhance communications. These commitments will ensure applicants have a fair and effective opportunity for appeal and Members and employees are supported as they deliver the appeal program to Canadians.

## Strategic Priorities

Strategic Plan 2010-2015 builds on a strong foundation of innovative and successful initiatives. The Board recognizes that it must continually work to improve its program. The following priorities have been identified:

### 1. Program Delivery:

- Continue to provide maximum opportunities for applicants' claims to be heard at the earliest opportunity.
- Focus on internal processes to meet post-hearing commitment to issue decisions within 6 weeks of hearing.

### 2. Improved Program Delivery:

- Refine the annual review hearing schedule in co-operation with representative

organizations.

- Focus on improving electronic access to hearing information for Members and representatives.
- Develop statutory and policy instruments to provide more accessible and transparent information about the hearing process for Members, representatives and the public.
- Initiate and implement a Members' Performance Management framework.
- Provide professional development opportunities and enhanced training materials for Members and employees.
- Ensure a work environment that respects diversity and the Board's core values of impartiality, excellence, integrity, respect and balance.
- Implement the Board's Human Resources & Business Plan which focusses on employment equity, official languages, learning, recruitment and succession planning.

### **3. Communication:**

- Continue to identify and pursue opportunities to communicate with internal and external audiences.
- Develop new tools to inform applicants and Canadians about VRAB's independent redress program and to provide information on the Board's processes and performance.

### **4. Accountable Management:**

- Review and strengthen management practices and processes.
- Identify and respond to additional accountability and reporting requirements.

