



Blake Richards, MP

Shadow Minister for Veterans Affairs
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

March 23, 2026

Dear Mr. Richards,

I am writing on behalf of Veterans with Cancer Inc. to share our enclosed paper, *Doing More With Less: How Veterans Affairs Canada Can Exceed Service Standards Despite Budget Cuts*, and to invite your support for a key recommendation: the implementation of an **Early Dispute Resolution (EDR)** program.

We have followed your recent advocacy regarding reductions to Veterans Affairs Canada and your call for greater transparency and accountability in how these cuts will affect veterans. Your concerns—that billions in reductions risk impacting benefits and service delivery—reflect what veterans themselves are experiencing: longer wait times, increased uncertainty, and growing barriers to accessing entitled benefits.

Our paper is grounded in the same reality but focuses on a practical path forward. While the fiscal environment may constrain new spending, there remains an opportunity to improve outcomes through structural reform.

The proposed EDR program would introduce a facilitated resolution step between initial VAC decisions and formal appeals. Evidence from comparable jurisdictions shows that such models can resolve a significant proportion of disputes earlier—reducing delays, lowering system costs, and improving fairness for claimants. In effect, EDR offers a way to mitigate the real-world impact of budget reductions by ensuring that more veterans receive timely decisions without needing to navigate a lengthy appeals process.

We believe this proposal aligns closely with your stated priorities.

EDR is not a substitute for proper funding or accountability. Rather, it is a complementary reform—one that addresses inefficiencies in the current system while reinforcing the principle that veterans should receive timely, fair decisions without unnecessary procedural burden.

As Shadow Minister for Veterans Affairs, your support could play an important role in advancing this proposal. Whether through committee study, parliamentary debate, or direct engagement with the



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department, there is an opportunity to ensure that practical, evidence-based solutions are part of the national conversation on veterans' services.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you or your staff to discuss this proposal in more detail and explore how it might be advanced within the current policy environment.

Veterans have earned more than timely words—they are entitled to timely decisions. We believe this initiative offers a credible and achievable way to move in that direction.

Respectfully,

Commander (ret'd) James P. Hutton, rmc, CD, BSc, MSc, MBA
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CC. Fraser Tolmie Member of Parliament for Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan

Enclosures (3):

- 1. Doing More with Less: How Veterans Affairs Canada Can Exceed Service Standards Despite Budget Cuts (Policy Paper)*
- 2. Doing More with Less: Executive Summary*
- 3. Draft Parliamentary Briefing Note*

Parliamentary Briefing Note

Issue: Delays and inefficiencies in Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) disability benefit claims

Purpose: Inform MP Blake Richards about the Early Dispute Resolution (EDR) proposal and its potential impact

Background:

- Veterans Affairs Canada has not met its own service standards for disability benefit claims for over a decade.
 - Current processes are slow and adversarial: veterans often wait 3–5 years for resolution.
 - Reductions to the Bureau of Pensions Advocates (44% cut in staff) reduce veterans' access to free legal support at the very moment the backlog is increasing.
 - Evidence shows 9 out of 10 VAC decisions challenged before the Veterans Review and Appeal Board (VRAB) are overturned.
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Proposed Solution – Early Dispute Resolution (EDR):

- Introduces a facilitated resolution step between initial VAC decisions and formal appeals.
 - Goal: Resolve a significant portion of disputes before formal adjudication.
 - Evidence of effectiveness:
 - Government of British Columbia quasi-judicial appeals: 70% resolved without formal adjudication.
 - VAC's own Early Resolution pilot: turnaround reduced from months to five weeks.
 - Comparable results documented in U.S. EEOC, Merit Systems Protection Board, and BC Civil Resolution Tribunal.
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Benefits of EDR:

- Reduces wait times for veterans and stress associated with adversarial claims.
 - Lowers volume of formal appeals, freeing resources for complex claims.
 - Operates within existing budget, using structural reform rather than additional funding.
 - Preserves veterans' right to full review if disputes are not resolved at the early stage.
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Strategic Opportunity:

- EDR addresses service gaps exacerbated by recent VAC budget cuts.
 - Provides an evidence-based solution for parliamentary advocacy on improving service delivery.
 - Aligns with MP Richards' public statements opposing cuts to VAC funding.
 - Opportunity for early parliamentary leadership on practical, non-legislative reform.
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Recommended Action:

- Advocate for the adoption of EDR within VAC through committee questions, correspondence with the Minister of Veterans Affairs, or public statements.
 - Encourage the department to consider pilot implementation under the VRAB to ensure independence and credibility.
 - Use this briefing to support evidence-based discussion in Parliament and relevant committees.
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Contact for Further Information:

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