



Shocking Wait Times for Veterans' Disability Claims And Three (3) Very Realizable Solutions to Solve the Problem

Introduction

Canada's injured veterans are waiting years—sometimes more than five years—to have their disability claims finalized. In 2022, an Auditor General's report revealed that Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) had failed to meet its 16-week service standard for seven consecutive years. Now, two years later, the situation has worsened. The number of applications continues to grow, forcing veterans who have served their country to endure unnecessary hardship, uncertainty, and financial distress. This is unacceptable.

In 2022, Auditor General Karen Hogan tabled a scathing report in the House of Commons, exposing a deeply flawed system at VAC, where critical delays persist in compensating injured veterans. Despite repeated initiatives to speed up processing, veterans from the Canadian Armed Forces and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police still face unacceptable wait times for the benefits they rightfully deserve. Alarming, these issues mirror those flagged in a 2014 Auditor General audit—showing little meaningful progress in a decade. The time has come for the Government of Canada to fulfill its commitment to veterans and resolve this chronic problem. Simply showing up once a year on November 11th is not sufficient.



Your attention one day per year is not enough!

The audit found that first-time applicants for disability benefits waited nearly 10 months for a decision in 2021—far longer than the Department's reported service standard of four months. Worse, the Auditor General found that the Department manipulated its reporting, closing files upon decision-making rather than accurately tracking total wait times, misleading the public about the true extent of delays. This practice continues today.

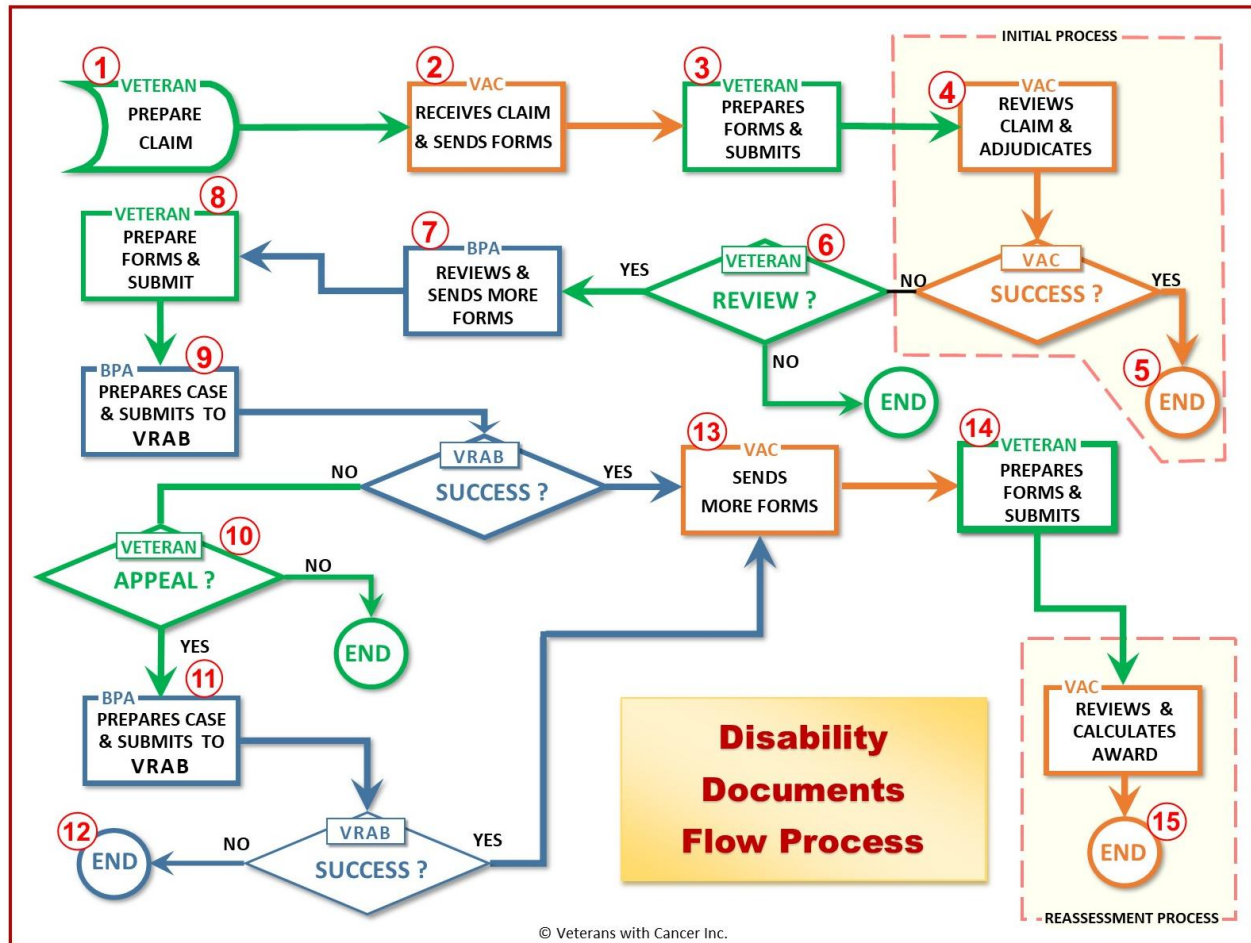
The 2014 Auditor General's report painted a stark picture of a system failing those who served Canada. However, things have continued to deteriorate. Since then, wait times have increased exponentially and continue to do so today. In 2022, the Auditor General found that VAC was processing 43,227 files, managed by a staff of 943 employees—many on term contracts. Since then, the number of files has ballooned to 80,256, while staffing levels have barely increased. This explains why wait times have spiraled out of control.

An informal social media survey of veterans who have been in the process for more than three years revealed an average wait time of 4.4 years, with some veterans waiting more than six years. Considering the sacrifices these veterans made for their country, this is deplorable. It is time for the Government of Canada to resolve this problem once and for all.

When individuals join the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), they accept the concept of Unlimited Liability, meaning they may have to risk their lives or those of their subordinates to accomplish government-assigned missions. This distinguishes military service from other professions in Canada. In return, the Government of Canada has a duty to provide services and compensation to members and veterans injured or deceased due to military service. Veterans Affairs Canada was established to fulfill this crucial role. The government can and must do more to expedite the adjudication of disability claims arising from service-related injuries.



Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) is staffed by dedicated professionals committed to serving veterans with efficiency and care. When issues affecting veterans with cancer have been raised, VAC senior management has responded swiftly and effectively, demonstrating a strong commitment to veterans' well-being. However, despite their best efforts, they cannot resolve this crisis without sufficient resources. Long wait-times are not due to bureaucratic inefficiency but rather the failure of the Government of Canada to uphold its duty to those who risked everything for their country. Specifically, the lack of funding for increased staffing at VAC, the Bureau of Pensions Advocates (BPA), and the Veterans Review and Appeal Board (VRAB) has prevented these agencies from keeping pace with the growing volume of veterans' claims, leading to the unacceptable delays seen today.



The Current Document Flow Process for Veterans' Disability Claims

The Process

On the surface, the disability claims process appears well-designed and efficient. It provides veterans with three levels of consideration, allowing them multiple opportunities to make their case. Three separate agencies are involved: Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) processes and adjudicates initial claims, the Bureau of Pensions Advocates (BPA) prepares veterans' files and represents them, and the Veterans Review and Appeal Board (VRAB) adjudicates Reviews and Appeals. This is a well-thought-out and fair process.

However, in terms of wait times, none of the agencies track the full duration of a veteran's journey through the system. VAC only measures two distinct processes, which were the only ones reviewed by the Auditor General: the Initial Process (from step 4 to step 5 or 6 in the diagram above) and the Reassessment Process (from



step 14 to 15). These Processes are shown in the diagram above surrounded by dotted lines. These are the only portions of the process where wait times are measured. This clearly shows that the Auditor General only reviewed wait times for a small portion of the overall process, about 30%, yet, found veterans were waiting 10 months just to get through these two processes.

We've had several veterans report that they've waited at step 2 for months just to get forms sent to them from VAC. Any delay in sending veterans the forms needed to begin the process, unnecessarily adds to the already lengthy wait times from the veteran's perspective. This practice needs to stop!

The Solution

To restore the 16-week service standard and provide timely support to veterans, we recommend the following immediate actions:

1. **Increase Permanent Staffing:** Authorize and fast-track the hiring of additional permanent employees for VAC, BPA, and VRAB. The number of new permanent employees should be sufficient to ensure that the initial process is completed within 16 weeks for most veterans, and for veterans requiring a review, completed within 32 weeks.
2. **Clear the Backlog:** Allocate funding to hire additional term employees for VAC, BPA, and VRAB to eliminate the existing backlog within one year.
3. **Improve Process Management:** Establish a Management Committee to monitor the entire process, steps 1 to 15, and identify veterans who have been in the system for more than one year for special consideration. A senior manager from each of VAC, BPA, and VRAB should be permanently assigned to the committee to ensure inter-agency collaboration, which is currently lacking due to siloed operations.

Conclusions

As highlighted by the Auditor General in 2022, the service standard for wait times has not been met since 2015. Since then, the volume of claims has nearly doubled, while staffing levels have not kept pace. An informal survey of veterans found that those waiting more than three years had an average wait time of 4.4 years. This is entirely unacceptable for the men and women who served their country with loyalty and dedication.

VAC, BPA, and VRAB are each staffed with dedicated professionals committed to serving veterans. However, they must be provided with the necessary tools and resources to do their jobs effectively. The process for handling veterans' disability claims is fundamentally sound. What is desperately lacking is sufficient staffing to manage today's claim volume efficiently.

The Government of Canada must act now to fix this crisis. Our veterans have given everything for us. It is time for Canada to give them the respect and support they deserve.



Advocacy

Awareness

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