



Canadians' Awareness of VAC's Benefits and Services and Satisfaction with VAC Communications Executive Summary

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Ce sommaire est aussi disponible en français.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Earnscliffe Strategy Group (Earnscliffe) is pleased to present this report to Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) summarizing the results of a quantitative research study to test Canadians’ awareness and perceptions of VAC, as well as satisfaction with VAC communications and services.

Earlier this year, the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) approved a communications outreach initiative to increase the Veteran community’s awareness and understanding of the suite of programs and services designed to support their well-being. This initiative was created in acknowledgement of the concerns raised by members of the Veteran community who find it difficult at times to navigate the programs and services offered by VAC. The overall goal of the initiative is to improve the way VAC connects with Veterans, members of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), as well as their families, and Canadians more broadly. VAC requires public opinion research to support this evidence based initiative by measuring Canadians’ level of understanding and awareness about Veterans’ benefits and services, and to determine ways of improving VAC’s communications with the public.

Quantitative research was required to inform VAC’s communications and outreach related to Veterans’ benefits and services. More specifically, the research results will be used to:

- Establish a baseline to determine Canadians’ awareness of VAC’s benefits and services, and satisfaction with VAC communications;
- Measure the public’s satisfaction with how VAC communicates to Canadians in support of those benefits and services; and,
- Gauge Canadians’ perceptions regarding VAC as delivering on the needs of Veterans and their families.

The specific objectives of the research are to measure:

- Public awareness of VAC benefits and services;
- Satisfaction with VAC communications in support of these benefits and services in order to plan for future communications and outreach with different audiences;
- Desirability traits of public institutions;
- Awareness (aided and unaided) of VAC programs and services; and,
- Satisfaction with how VAC communicates.

The total cost to conduct this research was \$102,512.87, including HST.

In order to achieve all of these objectives, Earnscliffe conducted a telephone survey of 2,015 Canadians ages 18 and older. Our chosen fieldwork subcontractor for this assignment was Léger due to their strength in quantitative (telephone) data collection. Founded in 1986, Léger is a Gold Seal Member of MRIA and is an accredited member of CASRO, ESOMAR, and CAN-SPAM. Interviews were conducted via telephone from Léger’s centralized call-centre using state of the art Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system.



Interviews were conducted between January 30 and February 21, 2018. The average length of interview was 16.5 minutes. The margin of error for a telephone sample of 2,015 Canadians is +/-2.18%, at the 95% confidence level.

An overlapping sampling approach was used for the telephone survey. In this approach, the cell phone sample is not screened for dual landline and cell users. A respondent is included in the sample as long as he/she uses a cell phone even though they may or may not have a landline. While the overlapping sampling method does not explicitly screen dual user households, it naturally reaches both cell phone only residents and those living in households with both cellphone and landline. Using this method, we estimated that the 2,000 interviews would be comprised of the natural distribution of landline only (LLO) households, cellphone only households (CPO) and households that have both a landline and a cellphone. The table below shows the Statistics Canada estimates for each of these segments, the expected number of interviews for each of these segments and the proportion of the survey sample that would constitute using the overlapping method.

Segment	Actual Proportion*	Expected n	Expected % of Sample
Landline only (LLO)	15.0%	300	15.0%
Cellphone only (CPO)	27.5%	550	27.5%
Households with both	57.5%	1,150	57.5%
TOTAL	100%	2,000	100%

*SOURCE: Statistics Canada, 2015 Survey of Household Spending

When using the overlapping method, the mix of dual and CPO does not always turn out to be exact. As a result, while we set a target of 550 interviews with CPO respondents, we guaranteed a minimum of 450 interviews among CPO respondents. In the end, we conducted 1,082 of the 2,015 interviews via cell phone (including 557 specifically screened as CPO) and 931 via landline (including 283 screened LLO).

The sample was targeted to the region, gender and age quotas outlined in the Appendices of this report, and the final data were weighted to replicate actual population distribution by region, age and gender according to the most recent Census (2016) data available. The key findings from the research are presented below.

Overall Observations

- Familiarity with VAC and its programs is low, but Canadians’ view of the importance of the programs offered is strong.
- Veterans’ mental health is particularly important to Canadians.
- Atlantic Canadians appear to be the most familiar compared to other Canadians across the country with VAC and its programs.
- Younger Canadians (18-34) tend to have a more positive view of VAC’s performance, but also report knowing the least about VAC.
- French-speaking Canadians are less familiar with VAC and its programs, and less likely than English speakers to rate programs as very important. That said, their evaluation of VAC’s performance in terms of communications is higher.



Awareness and Impressions

- **Unaided awareness and familiarity with VAC remain low and unchanged compared to 2012.** In both 2012 and 2018, just under one third (30%) can name the department that is responsible for members of the CAF once they have retired.
- **Familiarity from 2012 to 2018 remains virtually unchanged, with 15% in both years reporting they are very or somewhat familiar with VAC.** The same proportion in both years (45%) claim to not be familiar at all with VAC.
- **When it comes to serving the needs of Veterans, there was an erosion in the view of overall performance.** In 2012, the question was asked about VAC's service for all Veterans, and 30% felt VAC served their needs poorly or somewhat poorly. Now, 36% feel VAC serves the needs of older Veterans poorly, and 37% say the same for Canada's modern-day Veterans.
- **There is also now a stronger sense that VAC should be doing more to meet Veterans' needs.** In particular, the percentage who would like to see VAC do "a lot more" rose from 32% in 2012 to 45% in 2018.
- **Canadians' ratings of VAC's performance on a range of criteria were mixed,** and those who are more familiar with VAC tend to provide a more positive rating. VAC's highest performance ratings were for treating Veterans with respect - almost half of Canadians (49%) feel VAC performs well in this area. Opinion was more divided on VAC's honesty with and fairness towards Veterans, working hard for Veterans, and communicating with Veterans. Opinion is more negative than positive when it comes to being efficient and communicating with Canadians.

Programs and Services

- **Familiarity is low and unchanged from 2012.** Top Box (10/10) importance of all programs has increased, and the hierarchy remains nearly identical.
- **Mental health support continues to be the leading program (70% say it is very important).** It is followed by rehabilitation services (63%, up from 53%) and disability benefits (62%, up from 54%). Even the least important (Remembrance Day programming and career transition services) are rated as very important by the plurality of Canadians.
- **The percentage of Canadians who have heard something in the news recently about VAC rose over the tracking period,** from 30% in 2012 to 41% in 2018. Among those who had heard something, the most cited topic was "the government is not doing enough" (27%).

Surrounding Attitudes

- **There is broad consensus on a number of key attitudes related to VAC and Veterans, particularly when it comes to mental health.** Almost all (81%) say Veterans need a lot of mental health support, and 74% agree that there are more mental health challenges aside from PTSD.

- **For most (70%), Veterans' challenges seem to be increasingly complex.** They also feel finding the right government programs to address those needs can be challenging (60%).
- When it comes to support for Veterans' families, opinion is more divided - 29% feel VAC provides adequate support, while 24% disagree and 32% are neutral.
- The majority (60%) expect career transitioning is difficult. However, opinion is mixed as to whether Veterans integrate well back into civilian life.

Political Neutrality Statement

I hereby certify as a Representative of Earnscliffe Strategy Group that the final deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Policy on Communications and Federal Identity and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed: 

Date: March 14, 2018

Doug Anderson
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