



# ***Exploring perceptions, behaviours and experiences in relation to My VAC Account***

## **Executive Summary**

### **Prepared for Veterans Affairs Canada**

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### Executive Summary

Prepared for Veterans Affairs Canada  
Supplier name: Phoenix Strategic Perspectives Inc.  
June 2019

This public opinion research report presents the results of four online surveys, two online focus groups, and a set of 10 in-depth interviews conducted by Phoenix SPI on behalf of Veterans Affairs Canada. The target audience was My VAC Account users and departmental employees. The research took place between February and March, 2019.

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## Executive Summary

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Phoenix Strategic Perspectives Inc. (Phoenix SPI) was commissioned by Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) to conduct public opinion research in relation to My VAC Account. My VAC Account is a secure, authenticated web application that allows users<sup>1</sup> to access VAC services from anywhere, and at any time.

## Research Purpose and Objectives

Through My VAC Account, Veterans are able to conduct the majority of their business with the department online. They can use the Benefits Navigator to learn more about VAC benefits and services relevant to them, apply online for VAC benefits and services, upload documents to support applications, track the status of applications, receive online correspondence (forms and letters), view a summary of their VAC benefits, sign up for direct deposit or change banking information, update contact information, and connect with VAC through secure messaging. My VAC Account is continually enhanced as the department moves towards having a complete suite of services available online.

As the number of services that are moving to online platforms increases, and the number of Veterans and their families<sup>2</sup> who use My VAC Account continues to increase, it is critical to collect feedback from those who use the channel. For this reason, VAC commissioned public opinion research to be conducted with Veterans as well as with VAC employees. The objectives of the research were to collect feedback from Veterans with respect to their experiences using My VAC Account and to capture perspectives from frontline and other VAC employees. Together, this feedback is intended to help guide future enhancements of My VAC Account, ensuring it meets the needs of Veterans and it can be leveraged by the department to make work processes more efficient for employees.

## Methodology

Qualitative and quantitative research was conducted with the target populations: My VAC Account users and VAC employees. This included: three online surveys; two virtual focus groups with My VAC account users; one online survey; and 10 in-depth, one-on-one telephone interviews with departmental employees. What follows is an overview of the different elements of the research. Additional methodological information is available in the appendix.

The quantitative research consisted of four online surveys: three were conducted with users of My VAC Account and one with departmental employees. Specifically:

- The online surveys of My VAC Account users were intercept surveys, with survey respondents recruited through My VAC Account and the department's website.<sup>3</sup> In total, 795 individuals responded to the first survey, which was administered between February 28 and March 5, 2019. The second survey was conducted between March 20 and March 26, 2019 and 510 individuals responded. In total, 554 individuals

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<sup>1</sup> My VAC Account users include war service Veterans; Canadian Armed Forces members and Veterans; still-serving and retired RCMP members; and family members who are receiving benefits directly from VAC.

<sup>2</sup> 81,000 as of October 2018

<sup>3</sup> Recruitment notices were included on the department's website as a way to reach non-users of My VAC Account. In the end, very few non-users of My VAC Account (n=14 respondents) elected to participate in any of the online surveys.

responded to the third online intercept survey, which was administered between March 27 and April 2, 2019. These survey samples are non-probability samples<sup>4</sup>; for this reason, margins of error cannot be provided for the results of the three surveys.

- The online survey of VAC employees was a census; frontline (field operations, case managers and Veterans service agents) and Centralized Operations Division (COD) employees were invited to participate. The invitation to participate was sent by the department and the survey was available for completion from March 6 to March 19, 2019. In total, 161 departmental employees responded to the survey. Since this was an attempted census, there is no margin of sampling error to be estimated or reported.

The qualitative research consisted of two virtual focus groups with My VAC account users and 10 in-depth, one-on-one telephone interviews with departmental employees. Specifically:

- Two online focus groups were conducted with My VAC Account users recruited through the second online intercept survey. One group was conducted in French and the other in English. Both groups took place on March 27, 2019, and each group lasted 90 minutes. A total of 17 My VAC Account users participated (nine participants in the English group and eight in the French group). All research participants received a \$100 honorarium to thank them for their time.
- Ten in-depth, one-on-one telephone interviews were conducted with departmental employees recruited through the online survey. Interviews were conducted in the individuals' official language of choice during business hours. All interviews were completed between March 15 and 25, 2019 and averaged approximately 35 minutes.

## Summary of Findings

### I. My VAC Account Users

#### Use of My VAC Account

***Most use My VAC Account at least monthly and many do so on a weekly basis.***

The two features My VAC Account users were most likely to use are tracking the status of applications (91%) and My VAC Account Inbox (87%). In addition, most have applied for benefits and services (82%) and viewed a summary of benefits (82%).

#### My VAC Account Registration

***Most found registration easy and agree that the steps required to register for My VAC Account justify the security it provides. Just over half used GCKey to do so—primarily because they were not comfortable with the alternative, Secure Key.***

Fifty-seven percent of My VAC Account users surveyed said they registered for the online service using GCKey. When asked why they used GCKey 64% said they were more comfortable with GCKey than the alternative, their online banking login. Most My VAC Account users found the process of registering to be somewhat (37%) or very (38%) easy and 70% agreed that the steps required to register justify the security it provides. A small

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<sup>4</sup> For this survey, probability sampling was not feasible because access to a list of My VAC Account users was not available.

number of My VAC Account users (15%) found it difficult to register. Those who found the registration process difficult were most likely to say that it took too long or there were too many steps (51%) or that they did not know what GCKey is (46%).

### Secure Messaging

***Most have used secure messaging to contact VAC, few have experienced difficulties when doing so, and the majority of users are satisfied with their experience using secure messaging.***

Most My VAC Account users who have used secure messaging waited five or fewer days to receive a response. Among those who contacted VAC through secure messaging, 32% said they were able to connect with their case manager through this channel. Of those who have a case manager, the vast majority (91%) would like to contact their case manager directly through secure messaging.

Two-thirds (66%) of those who have contacted VAC through secure message also had to follow up with VAC on these conversations. Just over three-quarters (76%) of those who followed up did so via secure messaging, while 58% followed up by calling VAC. The vast majority (89%) of those who used secure messaging to contact VAC did not have any difficulties. Fifty-six percent of those who used secure messaging over the 12 months preceding the research are satisfied with their experience.

### Online Chat

***There is moderate interest in an online chat feature among My VAC Account users. Most of those interested in this type of feature would want to use it to connect with a case manager.***

More than half the My VAC Account users surveyed expressed interest in an online chat feature, and approximately one-quarter indicated that they *might* be interested or *may* use this type of feature. Respondents were asked who at VAC they would like to speak to through an online chat. Almost three-quarters (74%) would like to speak with a case manager, 45% with the VAC National Contact Centre, and 42% with the Bureau of Pensions Advocates.

### Track Your Applications

***Most survey respondents had used 'track your applications' and found it at least somewhat helpful. The main weakness of the feature is that it does not provide sufficient details.***

The majority (88%) of My VAC Account users surveyed have used the 'track your applications' feature. Of those who have not, just over half (56%) said they have had no need to use the feature. In addition, 24% attributed their lack of use to lack of awareness of the feature, suggesting a need to better promote the feature. Half (50%) of those who used the feature found it helpful in finding out the status of their application, and an additional 40% found it *somewhat* helpful. In terms of weaknesses, 52% said it does not provide sufficient detail about what step their application is at. Focus group participants elaborated on this issue, emphasizing that the current tracking function is not useful or helpful because it does not provide detailed, customized, or personalized information about their applications.

## Benefits Navigator

***Many survey respondents had used the Benefits Navigator tool and most found it at least somewhat helpful.***

Two-thirds (66%) of the My VAC Account users surveyed said they used the Benefits Navigator tool. The most commonly cited reason for not using the tool was that they did not know about it. Just over half (54%) said this was the reason they had not used Benefits Navigator, suggesting a need to better promote the tool. Among those who used the Benefits Navigator tool, nine in 10 found it helpful on some level, including 38% who said it was very helpful.

## Guided Web Forms

***Three in 10 survey respondents have used a guided web form in My VAC Account to complete an application. Many still prefer online application forms to guide web forms.***

Three in 10 My VAC Account users said they had used a guided web form in My VAC account to complete an application. Perceived benefits of doing so included: ease of completion (55%), the ability to save one's progress (53%), and time efficiency (it saves time using a web form) (51%). When asked which method they prefer to use to complete applications, 48% said they prefer online application forms while 30% expressed a preference for a guided web form.

## Related Communications Issues

***My VAC Account is the preferred channel for receiving updates from the department and most would like to hear from the VAC at least once a month. The top topics of interest are changes to benefits and new benefit rates. In addition, most have signed up for email notifications.***

Eight in 10 (81%) My VAC Account users would prefer to learn through My VAC Account about updates from the department to benefits. When asked how frequently they would prefer to receive news from VAC, most said at least once a month: 45% would like to receive news once a month, and 36% about once a week. When asked which topics they would like to hear about, most selected changes to benefits and new benefit rates. Eighty-six percent of My VAC Account users who responded to the survey are signed up for email notification alerts, and virtually everyone who receives them finds them somewhat (32%) or very (65%) useful.

## II. Departmental Employees

### Awareness and Use of My VAC Account

***There is widespread familiarity with My VAC Account and many use it on a daily basis.***

The majority of employees who completed the survey said they are somewhat (46%) or very (38%) familiar with My VAC Account. Employees are most familiar with secure messaging (86%), followed by the features allowing Veterans to upload documents (70%) and to update their contact or direct deposit information (68%). Almost half (47%) refer to My VAC Account at least once a day while interacting with Veterans. In addition, two in 10

(21%) refer to it several times a week and nearly one in 10 (8%) do so about once a week. In total, therefore, 76% generally refer to My VAC Account at least weekly.

### Secure Messaging

***Most have used secure messaging and have had a positive experience with the communication feature.***

In the 12 months preceding the research, 71% of employees who refer to My VAC Account have used secure messaging to communicate with Veterans. Nine in 10 reported having a good (42%) or very good (48%) experience. Employees who use secure messaging use it daily (34%) or several times a week (16%) and most (84%) have not experienced any difficulties using the feature to communicate with Veterans in the last year. Nearly half use secure messaging to respond to messages initiated by My VAC Account users (49%) and to both respond and initiate communication with My VAC Account users (46%). Very few (4%) use secure messaging only to initiate communication.

### Motivators to Use My VAC Account

***Understanding how to use My VAC Account is the top motivator to promote use.***

Those familiar with My VAC Account were asked what would encourage them to promote use of My VAC Account with Veterans. Nearly half (46%) said that having a better understanding of how to use My VAC Account would encourage them to promote the online service channel. Approximately one-third (32%) would consider promoting My VAC Account if they had a better understanding of the advantage of the online service channel and one-quarter suggested having My VAC Account ambassadors or champions on their team as a resource.

### Notes to Readers

- The report is divided into two sections. The first section presents the results of the research conducted with My VAC Account users, and the second section presents the results of the research conducted with departmental employees.
- Regarding the qualitative results:
  - The results provide an indication of participants' views about the issues explored, but they cannot be generalized to the full population of My VAC Account clients or departmental employees.
- Regarding the quantitative results:
  - All results in the report are expressed as percentages, unless otherwise noted. Throughout the report, percentages may not always add to 100% due to rounding.
  - In graphs, "DK" stands for "Don't know" and "NR" for "No response."
  - The number of respondents changes throughout the report because questions were asked of sub-samples of survey respondents. Readers should be aware of this and exercise caution when interpreting results based on smaller numbers of respondents.



- The results are reflective of My VAC Account users, but they cannot be considered representative of the target population because random sampling was not used. When non-probability sampling is used, the extent to which the survey sample represents the target population is not known (because probability theory cannot be applied). Given the nature of the sampling, it is possible that the survey sample over-represents more frequent users of My VAC Account.
- The tabulated data is available under separate cover and the research instruments can be found in the appendix.

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The contract value was \$99,973.36 (including HST).

### **Political Neutrality Certification**

I hereby certify as a Senior Officer of Phoenix Strategic Perspectives that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the *Communications Policy* of the Government of Canada and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. Specifically, the deliverables do not contain any reference to electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leader.

Signed:



Alethea Woods, President  
Phoenix Strategic Perspectives Inc.