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

Executive Summary

Prepared for Veterans Affairs Canada

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Supplier name: Phoenix Strategic Perspectives Inc.

May 2021

This public opinion research report presents the results of a non-probability online survey of 650 My VAC Account users conducted between March 4 and March 13, 2021, and two virtual focus groups, also conducted with My VAC Account users. The focus groups were held March 24 (English) and March 25, 2021 (French).

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Executive Summary

Phoenix Strategic Perspectives Inc. (Phoenix SPI) was commissioned to conduct quantitative and qualitative research with clients of Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) who use the Department's secure online service, My VAC Account.

1. Research purpose and objectives

To support My VAC Account, the Department commissioned public opinion research to explore account holders' perceptions, behaviours, and experiences using My VAC Account. Specific areas of investigation included functionality of the service channel, user preferences for communicating with the Department, and satisfaction with the digital channel. In addition, the research was designed to collect information in support of improvements to My VAC Account—specifically, information to help the Department measure reaction to changes implemented since the last public opinion research was conducted in 2019. This research was first conducted in 2017; this year's research represents the third iteration of the study.

2. Methodology

A non-probability online survey was conducted with My VAC account users. Respondents were recruited through advertisements placed in My VAC Account and on the Department's social media channels. The survey averaged 17 minutes to complete. In total, 650 surveys were completed between March 4 and March 13, 2021. In addition, two virtual focus groups were conducted with My VAC Account users following the online survey: one group in English (March 24, 2021) and one group in French (March 25, 2021). All focus group participants received a \$100 honorarium to thank them for their time.

3. Key findings¹

Just over half used GCKey to register for my VAC Account. They did so primarily because they were not comfortable with the alternative, Sign-in Partner. The majority who used GCKey found registration easy and most agreed that the steps required to register for My VAC Account justify the security it provides.

Fifty-four percent of My VAC Account users surveyed said they registered for the online service using GCKey (43% used Sign-in Partner). Of those who used GCKey, 68% said they were more comfortable with GCKey than the alternative, using their online banking login (27%). Most My VAC Account holders who used GCKey to register found the process of registering to be 'somewhat' (34%) or 'very' (41%) easy and the majority (81%) agreed that the steps required to register justify the security it provides.

Half use My VAC Account weekly and most account holders have used the online channel to track applications, apply for benefits and services, receive correspondence, communicate with the Department, or view a summary of benefits.

When asked how frequently they use My VAC Account, approximately half said they do so weekly: 26% do so several times a week and 23% about once a week. Few (10%) use their account daily. At

¹ Results are presented for the survey unless otherwise indicated.

the other end of the spectrum, roughly 4 in 10 use their account less than once a month (15%) or about once a month (24%). A majority of respondents have used My VAC Account to track applications (90%), apply for benefits and services online (89%), receive correspondence from VAC (85%), to communicate with VAC through secure messaging (83%), to view a summary of their benefits (82%), or to upload documents in support of their application (79%). Two-thirds (67%) reported using the Wait Time Tool and relatively few (9%) said they had used the Member Transition Task List.

Like survey respondents, focus group participants' use of My VAC Account varied, but is also relatively frequent. Participants could not identify any type of transaction or interaction for which they would not use My VAC Account. For focus group participants, the most important services available through My VAC Account include news and updates, secure messaging, tracking applications, and uploading documents, applications as well as forms. All of these services allow for faster, more effective, and efficient interactions with VAC.

90% of survey respondents used the Track your Applications Tool. Most found the tool at least somewhat helpful, although just one-quarter said the feature provides them with enough detail. Indeed, the main weakness of the tool is that it does not provide sufficient detail.

Among survey respondents who used Track your Applications, most (84%) found the tool at least somewhat helpful: 39% said it helped them find out the status of their application and 45% said it did so 'in part' or 'somewhat'. Underscoring these moderately positive assessments, many (69%) said the tool is lacking in detail about the status of their application. Focus group participants emphasized that the tracking feature does not provide detailed, customized, or personalized information about the status of their applications. Survey respondents indicated there is a lack of information at the various steps in the application process (30%), timelines are inaccurate and there are delays (29%), and the information provided is vague or general in nature (25%). Many of the My VAC Account holders (60%) would like more accurate and personalized wait times to be provided together with the ability to see the position of their file in the application processing queue.

8 in 10 used secure messaging, with most My VAC Account users saying they waited up to five business days for a secure message reply. Few experienced difficulties and the majority of users were satisfied with their experience using secure messaging. More than half needed to re-contact VAC to have a follow-up conversation and most (again) used secure messaging.

Among respondents who have used secure messaging in the past 12 months, 38% waited one to two business days and 47% three to five business days for a reply. Actual wait times generally are in line with respondents' expectations. Forty-three percent expected to wait one to two business days for a reply (compared to 38% who did), while the same proportion expected to wait three to five business days (compared to 47% who did). In addition, two-thirds (66%) were satisfied or 'very' satisfied with their experience using secure messaging and very few (7%) experienced any difficulties. A small majority (55%), however, needed to re-contact VAC to have a follow-up conversation; seven in 10 (71%) of those who needed to re-contact VAC did so via secure messaging.

Most are satisfied with their experience using My VAC Account. Perceptions of the information available in My VAC Account were mixed, with room for improvement.

Approximately two-thirds of surveyed My VAC Account users said they find ‘most’ of what they need (38%) or ‘everything’ they need (29%) when visiting My VAC Account. In addition, just over one-quarter (28%) generally find ‘some’ of what they need. Very few (4%) find none of what they need when visiting My VAC Account. Perceptions of the information available in My VAC Account were mixed: 61% agreed that the information is easy to understand, 55% that it helps them understand the next step, 51% that it includes helpful external resources, and 41% that it includes right amount of detail.

All focus group participants were of the opinion that VAC does not keep them well informed or as informed as they could be about programs and services through My VAC Account. In explaining why, many said that they have to do most of the research themselves to find out about programs and services. Related to this, it was also observed that, while the information is available through My VAC Account, one has to find it, which can be difficult, and when one does, it can be difficult to understand.

The majority (71%) of surveyed My VAC Account holders were satisfied with their experience using My VAC Account, including 31% who were ‘very’ satisfied. Relatively few (13%) expressed dissatisfaction with their experience using My VAC Account. Overall satisfaction is underscored by the fact that 83% of survey respondents agreed that My VAC Account uses practices that ensure system security and 79% would recommend My VAC Account to others. Among focus group participants, impressions of My VAC Account also tended to be fairly positive, with many pointing to speed and efficiency, the service’s interface, and 24/7 accessibility as benefits of the service channel.

4. Limitations of the research

Surveys that use convenience samples, like this one, cannot be described as statistically projectable to the target population and no estimates of sampling error can be calculated because the sample is based on those who self-selected for participation. The results from the virtual focus groups are also not statistically projectable, but they offer detailed opinions about the issues explored through this research that complement the broader survey findings.

5. Use of the results

This feedback from the quantitative and qualitative research components will help guide the future of My VAC Account, allowing the Department to prioritize enhancements moving forward and measure progress over time.

6. 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.

7. Contract value

The contract value was \$54,867.72 (including HST).