



Veterans' Media Preferences and Awareness of VAC Programs and Services

Summary

Prepared for Veteran's Affairs Canada

Supplier: EKOS RESEARCH ASSOCIATES INC.

Contract number: 51019-207004/001/CY

Contract value: \$157,418.46

Award date: May 17, 2021

Delivery date: May 25, 2022

Registration number: POR 006-21

For more information on this report, please contact Veterans Affairs Canada at commsresearch-commsrecherche@veterans.gc.ca

Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français

Veterans' Media Preferences and Awareness of VAC Programs and Services

Summary

Prepared for Veterans Affairs Canada

Supplier name: EKOS RESEARCH ASSOCIATES INC.

Date: May 25, 2022

This public opinion research report presents the results of a telephone and online survey, as well as 14 online focus groups conducted by EKOS Research Associates Inc. on behalf of Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC). The research study was conducted with 2,621 Canadian Veterans including former RCMP, family members, and Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) reservists between February and March 2022.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre Préférences médiatiques des vétérans et connaissance des programmes et des services d'ACC.

This publication may be reproduced for non-commercial purposes only. Prior written permission must be obtained from VAC. For more information on this report, please contact VAC at: commsresearch-commsrecherche@veterans.gc.ca

Catalogue Number: V44-14/2022E-PDF

International Standard Book Number (ISBN): 978-0-660-43037-9

Related publications (registration number: POR 006-21)

Catalogue Number V44-14/2022F-PDF (French Report)

ISBN 978-0-660-43038-6

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) supports Veterans and their families and promotes recognition and remembrance of Veterans' achievements and sacrifices during times of war, military conflict and peace. At the time the report was released, the total population of Veterans in Canada is estimated to be 629,300¹. This includes 32,100 War Service Veterans and 597,200 Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Veterans; however, this population is expected to decline through the next five years. In addition, VAC administers benefits of 15,306 Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) members or former members and their survivors. It is estimated that VAC serves 19% of the Veteran population in Canada. In 2019-20, the proportion of clients increased by 0.5% and is forecasted to increase by about 1% each year over the next five years. In support of the development of strategic marketing campaigns to support clients, VAC is commissioning research to better understand the Veteran community in terms of awareness of services and benefits offered by VAC and media consumption habits.

B. METHODOLOGY

Survey

The survey component of this study was focused on former CAF members and RCMP members, and their families and caregivers, who have accessed VAC services ("clients"), as well as those not currently receiving VAC services and benefits ("non-clients"). The survey is comprised of 1,020 cases completed with clients, and 1,601 completed with Veterans' who are non-clients.

Former CAF and RCMP members and their families or caregivers who have accessed services (clients) were surveyed by telephone from a randomly drawn list provided by VAC, including name, and telephone number as well as region, gender and language for the purposes of post-survey weighting. From a randomly selected list of roughly 14,000 clients, a total of 1,020 were included in the survey sample. Clients were screened at the time of the survey to ensure they met study criteria (i.e., are former CAF/RCMP members or family or caregivers, and have accessed VAC services or benefits). The interview length averaged 22 minutes by telephone, and was collected between January 31 and February 24, 2022, following pre-testing online and

¹ Veterans Affairs Canada. *Facts and Figures Summary*. Online: [Summary - Facts and Figures - Veterans Affairs Canada](#)

by telephone, in both languages. The response rate for the client sample is 11%. The margin of error for the overall client sample is +/-3.1% at a 95% confidence interval, ranging from 4% to 10% for sub-groups. Survey results for clients are weighted by age, region and gender. Table 1 and Appendix A present the method of calculation of the response rate, sample characteristics of both the client and non-client sample, as well as discussion of the potential for non-response bias.

A sample of 1,601 Veterans who have not accessed programs or services from VAC (non-clients) was also collected, using an open link because no exhaustive list is currently available to VAC. The link was initially circulated through e-mail to VAC stakeholders, a feature on the VAC website, and announcements distributed through VAC social media sites. When this approach did not generate sufficient traffic, the survey was announced, with the open link, in an e-newsletter from the National Association of Federal Retirees (NAFR), which was where most of the sample of 1,601 non-clients was generated from. As a consequence, the sample of non-clients represents older Veterans than the sample of VAC clients. Because the sample of non-clients was not collected in a random fashion there is no way of determining its representativeness of the population and no margin of error can be applied.

Focus Groups

Fourteen focus groups were also conducted. The sample of participants was obtained through an opt-in question in the surveys completed by clients and non-clients. Eight discussions with non-client Veterans and six discussions with client Veterans were conducted online between March 15th and 23rd, 2022. Each discussion lasted roughly 90 minutes for which participants received \$100. Each discussion involved four to seven participants for a total of 85 participants from across the country. Recruitment included Veterans representing one of several key equity groups: visible minority, women, Indigenous, and members of the LGBTQ2+ community.

Discussions touched on definitions of a “Veteran”, sources of information used, preferred methods for finding out about VAC programs and services, experiences with VAC communication channels to gather information, and need for changes related to accessing information on programs and services from VAC. The discussion guide can be found in Appendix C.

C. KEY FINDINGS

Below is a selected summary of findings. For further information, please refer to the Detailed Findings section of this report.

- Respondents consisted mostly of Veterans, with a small proportion of family members of Veterans. Over four in five respondents represented former CAF members, while 19% of non-clients and 13% of clients were former members of the RCMP.
- Non-clients responding to the survey were older, on average, than that of the client sample. This was likely due to the method of soliciting participation in the open survey through public channels, including the e-newsletter from the NAFR.
- Almost half of clients and one in three non-clients said they needed, or were interested in, Disability Benefits in the year prior to the survey. One in four non-clients were also interested in the Veterans Independence Program (VIP), Long-Term Care (LTC), Treatment Benefits and VAC Assistance Services Line.

Looking for Information on Government of Canada Programs and Services

- Sources used by Veterans to obtain information about programs and services from the Government of Canada were identified. Internet was at the top of the list for the majority of non-clients and clients (61% and 60%, respectively). Mail from the Government of Canada was the second most popular source among non-clients (57%), followed by general mentions of Government of Canada websites (40%) which was the second most popular source among clients (51%) who relied somewhat less on mail (41%).
- Topics recently of interest to the majority of respondents were pension or benefit information, followed by information about taxes. One in three looked for health-related information. Programs and services specifically for former members of the military or RCMP were of interest to 30% of non-clients, and half of clients.

Awareness of Programs and Services for Veterans

- Nearly three in four clients said they were familiar or aware of programs and services available for Veterans and their families. Among non-clients, half said they were not familiar with programs and services available for Veterans and their families. Two in three (69%) non-clients were unable to name any programs and services for Veterans and their families.
- Interest was high with 75% of non-clients indicating interest in learning more about programs and services for Veterans.
- Only 7% of non-clients said they were familiar with the VAC services and benefits. By contrast, 38% of clients were familiar with the services and benefits offered by VAC and another 38% were moderately aware. Results were similar in focus group discussions, with many non-clients describing a complete lack of awareness of VAC programs and services.

Looking for Information on VAC Programs and Services

- Only a minority of non-clients have tried to find out about VAC programs and services. For about half of those who have not looked for information, they said it is because they have no interest or need for VAC programs at the moment. Another one in three said they had no idea they could ask for support from VAC.
- When trying to find out about VAC programs and services, the majority went to a Government of Canada website or mention the Internet generally. Various other sources were mentioned by one in five or less, including mail from the Government of Canada or a Service Canada office. Fewer than one in ten sourced magazines, social media, online news outlets, cable / satellite TV, local print newspapers, and neighbourhood or community newsletters.
- Problems most often experienced when trying to look for information relate to inability to find the information needed, followed at a distance by not knowing where to look or who to call, or not understanding the information. Some also pointed to inability to speak with someone at VAC. Results were similar among clients and non-clients.

Experiences with the VAC Website and Other Electronic Communications

- Among those preferring the VAC website to find information about VAC programs and services, ease of access was the most predominant reason, particularly among clients (68%), but also among non-clients (45%). Trust and reliability of the source was another key reason according to 54% of clients, although less so among the non-client sample (23%).
- A high proportion of clients said they used the website because it was likely the most up-to-date source (45%), the easiest to understand (42%) or they were familiar with it (40%). Among those who use the VAC website, both clients and non-clients used it to get information (70% and 77%, respectively). To a lesser extent, clients also tended to use the VAC website to access their My VAC Account, download or print an application or to access services.
- Focus group participants described the website as difficult to navigate to find information they were looking for, and difficult to understand what was relevant for their own situation. Many said they needed the assistance of someone with greater knowledge of VAC programs and services and the VAC website in order to be successful in their search.
- Just over one in ten Veterans said they used social media specifically for VAC programs and services. Among those who did, Facebook was the most popular platform, cited by three in four social media users. Clients were more likely to be more satisfied than non-clients with the information they receive on VAC social media channels, although satisfaction was predominately “moderate”.
- In the focus groups, a similar level of use was presented, with discussion about ex-service groups they were connected to as useful opportunities to increase awareness and connection to VAC. A few expressed concerns about trust of information presented on social media.

- In focus groups, some participants expressed an interest in receiving e-newsletters in order to increase their awareness of programs and services, as well as eligibility criteria. There was almost no awareness among clients or non-clients of Salute.

Connecting with VAC

In the survey results, there were mixed view about the best time to learn about the services for Veterans.

- 29% of non-clients and 43% of clients would have been interested in learning about programs and services within a year to several years before leaving the military.
- 12% of non-clients and 14% clients would have liked this information as they were leaving.
- 5% of non-clients and 9% of clients would have been interested just after leaving
- 26% of non-clients and 27% of clients believed the best time would have been several years after their service.
- In the focus groups, most participants felt the best time to learn about these services was before leaving the CAF/RCMP. While most believed awareness should be generated early and throughout the service career, others suggested the last few years as one begins the transition to release is the best time.
- According to survey results, the best method for finding out about VAC programs and services is through the website, or by talking to a VAC agent, as well as by word of mouth, the Legion or Service Canada.
- Focus group participants focused mostly on the website, in conjunction with assistance from someone at VAC or the Legion.

Nearly three in four non-clients and half of clients said they have not connected with any Veterans organizations to find out about programs and services for Veterans and their families. Of those who suggested groups for VAC to work with to help share information, the Royal Canadian Legion (the Legion) was mentioned by one in five respondents, although the large majority said they did not know which groups VAC should work with.

Among focus group participants, the Legion was also described most frequently as another, or even best, source for information about VAC programs and services because they are knowledgeable and can provide guidance. Some, particularly younger participants, said that the Legion is typically seen as an organization for older Veterans and not one that is relevant for them. A few other sources suggested were former service groups where one can find Veterans with experience with VAC.

- About two in three clients were at least moderately satisfied with how VAC informs them about relevant programs and services. By comparison, nearly half of non-clients said they were not satisfied with how VAC informs them about relevant programs and services. Focus group participants were, by and large, not satisfied.

Need for Changes in Connecting with VAC

- One in three clients and non-clients said their impression is that it is difficult to access programs and services offered by VAC. Only 29% of clients and 6% of non-clients said it is easy.
- Focus group participants described a similarly negative impression, pointing to a difficult and convoluted website, and application process, long wait times, lack of transparency and limited successful applicants.
- According to two in five non-clients, VAC needs to make it easier to find the information about programs and services and make the eligibility criteria for programs and services more straight forward. Roughly one in four mentioned changes needed in processing times for applications (25%), relevance of the information provided (22%), and clarity of the information (22%). A notable proportion (28%) was unsure.
- Clients expressed different priorities for suggested changes than non-clients. Half of clients said VAC needs to change processing times for applications for programs and services (50%). About one in three felt that the ability to find information (36%) or eligibility criteria (35%) needs to change. As with non-clients, just under one in four clients (23%) felt the clarity of the information needs to improve.
- Focus groups participants also emphasized the need to:
 - increase coordination of information with CAF and RCMP to introduce information about VAC programs and services earlier; partner more with other organizations and service/community groups; proactively reach Veterans where opportunities present themselves (e.g., pension communications, NAFR newsletter); and advertise;
 - increase resources to reduce backlog;
 - streamline and clarify the application process;
 - provide greater access to information and support to successfully negotiate the application process and access VAC programs and services.

D. NOTE TO READERS

Detailed findings are presented in the sections that follow. Overall results are presented in the main portion of the narrative and are typically supported by graphic or tabular presentation of results. Results for the proportion of respondents in the sample who either said “don’t know” or did not provide a response may not be indicated in the graphic representation of the results in all cases, particularly where they are not sizable (e.g., 10% or less). Results may also not total to 100% due to rounding.

Bulleted text is also used to point out any statistically and substantively significant differences between sub-groups of respondents. Key demographic patterns of interest are described throughout the report under specific headings: Veteran or their family, Region, Urban versus Rural, Age, Gender, Education, Income, and Disability. Only differences that are statistically and substantively different (i.e., typically five percentage points from the overall mean) are presented. The survey instrument can be found in Appendix B.

Overall themes are also described for focus group responses by anonymized, illustrative quotes. It should be noted that the results of the discussions are qualitative in nature. These results should not be assumed to be representative of the experiences of the wider population of Veterans in Canada. Responses from the discussions are meant to provide more detailed illustrations of experiences and perspectives. For this reason, terms such as “a few,” “some” and “most” are used to broadly indicate views, rather than using specific percentages. To ensure a common understanding of the terms used in the analysis, the following guidelines were used in analysing and reporting on participant results:

- “A few participants” = less than 25 per cent;
- “Some participants” = 25 to 49 per cent;
- “Many participants” = 50 to 75 per cent; and
- “Most participants” = over 75 per cent.

It should also be understood that the information provided by participants is subjective in nature, based on their own recollection, and perceptions and should not be interpreted as factual in nature.

E. CONTRACT VALUE

Contract Number: 51019-207004/001/CY

Contract Value: \$157,418.46

Award Date: May 17, 2021

F. POLITICAL NEUTRALITY CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify as Senior Officer of EKOS Research Associates Inc. that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Policy on Communications and Federal Identity and the Directive on the Management of Communications. 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 by:



Susan Galley (Vice President)