

Media Report 07 April 2023

This weeks media reports will cover and answer great questions veterans are still asking and local Media Articles and An illness or injury can have an impact on your ability to adjust to life after service. We all need healthcare services. The Treatment benefits program provides coverage for a variety of benefits and services to help you get—and stay healthy

VAC Timely disability benefits decisions: Strategic direction for improving processing times

Update for 2023 – 2024

Mission

Our mission is to make faster disability benefits decisions and to make the process easier for Veterans, current and former members of the Canadian Armed Forces and the RCMP as well as their families.

To do this, we will continue to:

- find new ways to make our processes more efficient;
- ensure we have enough staff;
- empower our employees;
- increase integration within our teams using a whole-of-VAC approach;
- be more innovative;
- leverage digital technology;
- improve the application experience; and
- as we do this work, we will continue to directly engage Veterans to improve their application experience.

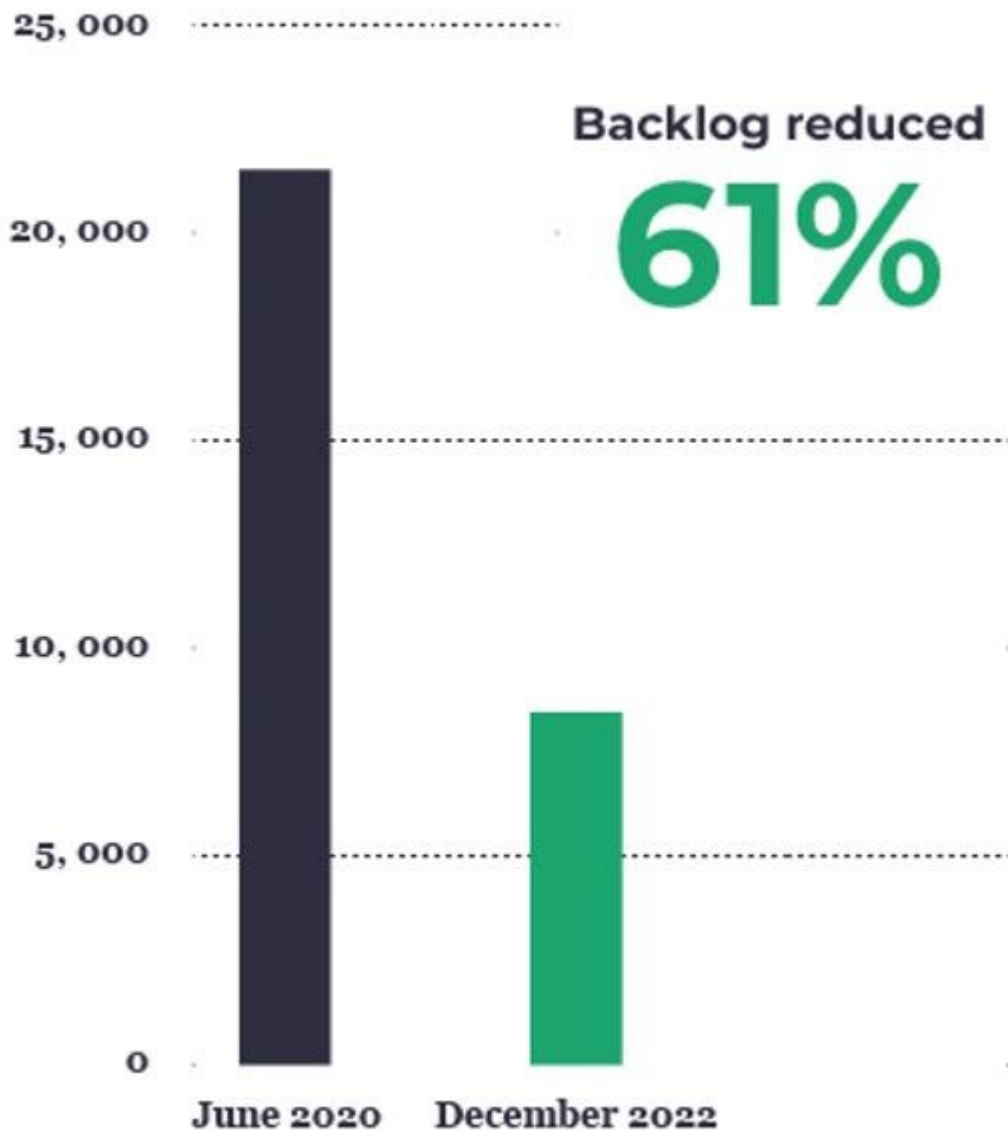
Background

Our service standard for disability benefits is for 80 percent of decisions to be made within 16 weeks for first applications and reassessments; and 12 weeks for departmental reviews. Starting in 2015, VAC began to experience a significant increase in applications. Over the following years, the number of applications beyond the service standard (i.e. the backlog) grew. In 2019-20, 23% of applications had a decision within 16 weeks, and the backlog peaked at over 23,000 in May 2020.

In June 2020, we released our [strategic direction for improving wait times](#) to address this long-standing issue. This is an update on our progress and outlines the path forward to 2024.

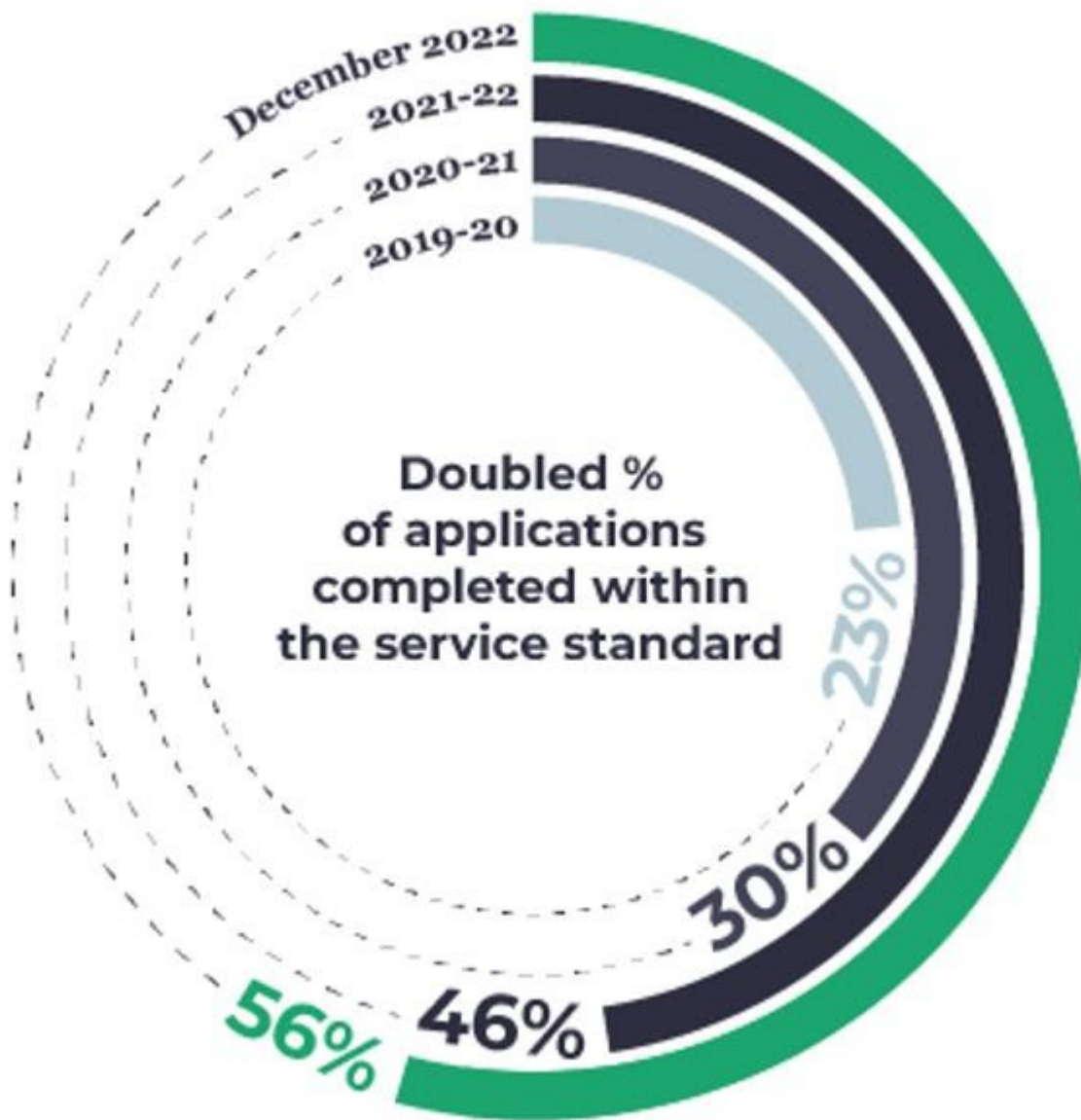
Progress and current situation

Significant progress has been made, but there is still more work to be done. From Spring 2020 to December 2022, we reduced the number of applications in the backlog by over 60% and the number of pending applications (incomplete and/or ready for a decision) by 31%. And we made this progress despite challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic. In summer 2022, for the first time ever, we reduced the backlog to less than 10,000. Our goal is to get below 5,000 by spring/summer 2023. As of 30 December 2022, we have 31,243 pending applications, with 8,365 in the backlog.

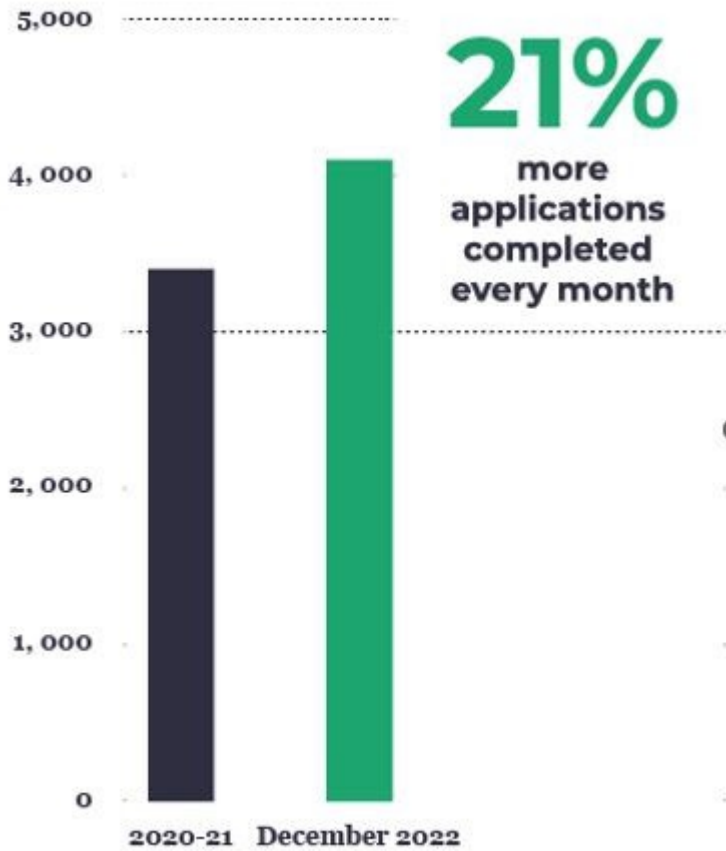


Reduced the number of applications in the backlog by 61%, from 21,572 in June 2020 to 8,365 applications as of December 30, 2022, and an overall reduction of

64% from 23,260 during the peak in May 2020;



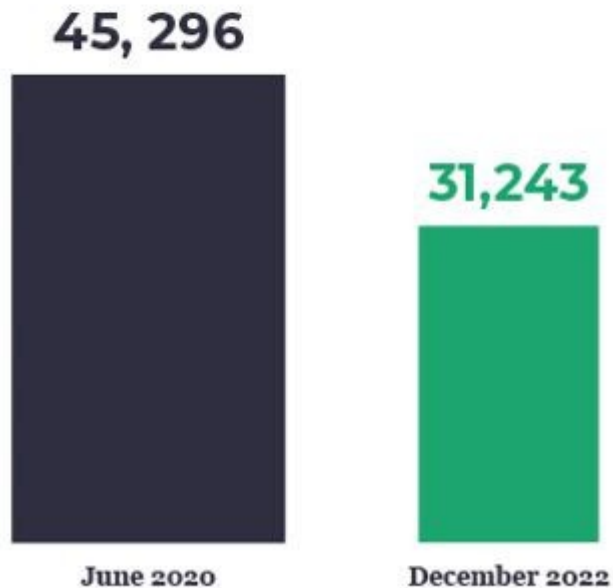
Increased the percentage of applications completed within the 16-week service standard, from 23% in 2019-20, to 30% in 2020-21, to 46% in 2021-22 and to 56% in December 2022.



An average of 4,100 applications were completed per month from April to December 2022, a 21% increase from the monthly average of 3,400 in 2020-21.

Pending applications down

31%



Reduced the number of pending applications by 31%, from 45,296 in June 2020 to 31,243 in December 2022.

While we have made progress, we know there is more work to be done.

In 2022, the Office of the Auditor General and the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs made recommendations to address data issues, secure long-term resourcing and address inequities in processing times. Work is well underway to address each of these recommendations.

Strategic direction

We will continue to reduce processing times through four lines of effort:

1. [Public service capacity](#)
2. [Integration](#)
3. [Process innovation](#)
4. [Digitization](#)

Public service capacity

Increasing our capacity

In 2020, the Government committed more than \$192 million over two years (2020-2022) to retain and hire an additional 350+ temporary employees dedicated to making decisions and reducing processing times. The funding also

enabled us to explore innovative measures to process future applications more efficiently.

In February 2022, an additional \$139.6 million was secured to extend already-trained temporary decision-making employees until March 2024, allowing us to minimize training time and maximize time spent on decision making.

We will continue to work on establishing long-term solutions to stabilize our staffing levels.

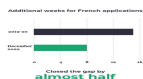
Overall, our work to reduce processing times continues to yield tangible results. Since June 2020 there has been a 31% decrease in the total number of pending applications, and a reduction of 61% in our backlog.

Reducing inequities through staffing

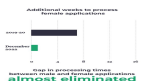
In addition to reducing overall processing times, we are addressing the longer wait times for Francophone and female applicants:

We are looking closely at the longer processing times for applications from Francophone Veterans to determine how this can be improved. Since 2020, we have hired more bilingual and francophone Disability Adjudicators to increase our capacity to process French applications and bring the average processing times for English and French applications closer to parity. As of September 2022, approximately 30% of our decision-making staff are francophone or bilingual.

In September 2021, we added a team dedicated to applications from female applicants. This approach is working, and we are closing the gap between male and female applicants.



Improvements in processing times on claims from French applicants – the gap in average processing between French and English applications reduced from 15 weeks in 2019-20 to 8 weeks as of December 2022. We have nearly doubled the percentage of French first applications processed within the service standard, increasing from 26% in 2020-21 to 47% as of December 2022.



Significant improvements in processing times on claims from female applicants – the gap in average processing time between male and female applications reduced from 7 weeks in 2019-20 to 1 week as of December 2022.

Integration

We continue to use a whole-of-VAC focus to reduce processing times.

In June 2020, we established integrated Veteran Benefit Teams to breakdown silos, eliminate inefficient file hand-offs and improve the quality of decision-making. Now that these teams have been fully implemented, we are introducing new strategies to make faster decisions. For example, applications are now

assigned by medical condition to the first available decision maker, based on their training and expertise.

The Innovation Hub is a dedicated team within VAC that does research, consults with users and tests process changes and digital solutions. The Hub allows for collaboration with Veterans and their families, and among employees. Into 2024, the Hub will support reducing incomplete applications and exploring ways to more quickly receive medical documents from health care providers.

In 2022, VAC established an Outreach Unit to educate and guide employees and third party groups who assist Veterans in applying for Disability Benefits.

Information sessions will continue to be provided to these groups in order to assist them in providing one-on-one support to Veterans. This unit will be fully functional by March 2023.

Process innovation

Feedback from Veterans: In 2021, we held a three-week consultation on Let's Talk Veterans to ask how we could improve the disability benefit application experience. In May 2022, we published a [report](#) that summarized the feedback and how we will address it. We are acting on the recommendations in this report to ensure immediate and ongoing improvements in the process, fewer incomplete applications and improved processing times. For example, we are reviewing our application and communications material to ensure they meet applicants' needs. We will also review the application process to make it easier for Veterans to submit a complete application. We will explore the use of technology, drop down menus, clearer language, instructional videos and digital information sharing between My VAC Account and our decision-making support systems.

Improvements to managing and distributing workload: We have added Reporting and Analysis and Workload Management units that have in-depth program knowledge and faster access to real-time program and workload management data. This unit develops reports such as intake, pending applications and processing times that show where we should focus our efforts and help us prioritize workload.

Working on individual conditions: Disability benefit applications can include more than one medical condition. Decision-makers can now work on and make decisions on individual conditions, meaning multiple decisions can be issued at different times for one application. This allows Veterans to receive quicker decisions. In the coming months, we will explore moving from reporting on the number of applications pending to reporting on the number of conditions pending, which is more in line with how we process our work.

Better decision-making tools:

- **Modernizing our Entitlement Eligibility Guidelines (EEGs):** EEGs support decision-making on entitlement (i.e. whether and to what extent a disability is service related), which is the first part of the decision-making process. We are modernizing our EEGs to reduce hand-offs, ensure decisions are based on up-to-date health evidence, and that Gender

Based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus) is considered. We have already released a new EEG for Sexual Dysfunction, and plan to release a new EEG for Lumbar Spine conditions in the near future. The EEG modernization will explore opportunities for automation to enhance decisions tools and reduce administrative burden.

- Table of Disabilities modernization: The Table of Disabilities is used to assess the extent of a disability after the entitlement decision is made. We are modernizing the Table to reflect the most current health-related research, best practices, and to ensure that Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus) principles are applied. This work will make the Table easier to read, understand and use, as well as support automation opportunities. We expect these changes will contribute to faster processing times.
- Evidence-informed decision models (EIDM): EIDMs are rules-based tools that allow staff to process claims faster for certain conditions. We have expanded the number of conditions processed through this model, and will continue to explore opportunities to further expand them. For example, we are developing EIDMs for conditions commonly arising as consequential to mental health conditions.
- Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus): The [2021 census](#) provided us with the first census profile of Canada's military in half a century. Going forward, Veteran demographics will continue to shift and diversify.

Using GBA Plus data allows us to better understand the needs of all Veterans to ensure we maximize access, equity and diversity of our programs, services, and benefits. We are continuing to develop and improve data collection, analysis, and assessment of program impacts on gender and diversity. We are currently working on a plan for Veterans and other clients to report their gender identity voluntarily to the Department. GBA Plus principles will be applied to new tools and initiatives including the EEGs and the Table of Disabilities.

Digitization

Service Health Record Search tool: We developed a tool to search Service Health Records for key evidence for hearing loss and tinnitus - the conditions for which we receive the highest volume of applications. Service Health Records can range from a few pages to thousands, depending on a Veteran's length of service and health history. This tool will save time searching these files and will extract information only relevant to the application, allowing us to make swifter decisions. We are exploring options to expand the tool to other common conditions.

VAC Healthshare: We developed a platform for medical practitioners to electronically submit medical reports, audiograms, and medical questionnaires, along with their invoices for services. We began testing the platform with audiologists in October 2022. This tool will allow us to receive medical documents more quickly, and improve consistency in the documents. We estimate this tool will save us up to two weeks of time, compared to documentation received by

mail.

Additional digitization initiatives: We will continue our work to optimize the use of automation and reduce administrative tasks for decision makers. This will allow more time to be devoted to processing complex claims. Examples include:

- Automatic generation of decision letters - by automatically populating as much information as possible in decision letters, we will complete our decisions faster by eliminating manual administrative tasks;
- Summary of Assessment verification - digitally confirming whether the same or similar condition has previously been ruled upon. This will allow for quicker allocation of the work; and
- My VAC Account improvements - enhancing both the user experience and our ability to use data from the information submitted. This will allow our decision-making support systems to automatically conduct activities such as ordering service health records, thereby minimizing administrative tasks.

Conclusion

Our top priority remains reducing processing times so that Veterans get faster access to the benefits they need.

We know there is much more work to do and we will use the knowledge gained over the last two years to guide our work through to 2024. One single initiative will not solve current challenges. We will make faster decisions by stabilizing our staffing levels, optimizing the use of automation and updating our tools, and processes.

We will continue to engage with Veterans to better understand their needs and so that they understand the work we are doing. We want to ensure that they have clear and reliable information about their benefits and the application wait times. As such, we will continue to proactively and transparently communicate on this issue and engage Veterans and other stakeholders.

The result of this work will be faster, standardized decisions that reflect care, compassion and respect.

Help us help homeless Veterans

No Veteran should be without a place to live—especially during our cold Canadian winters. If you know someone who served in the CAF or RCMP who is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, please help us help them.

Call 1-866-522-2122.

Veterans Affairs Canada has provided information on its programs and services to approximately 200 community organizations that work with the homeless in more than 50 cities across the country, including key information on how to

connect with VAC.

Available resources include:

- the Veterans Emergency Fund
- health care
- mental health services and supports
- financial support
- employment support
- career training and support
- the Veterans and Family Well-Being Fund
- case management
- local service providers.

For example, the Veterans Emergency Fund offers immediate support which can provide funds quickly for urgent and unexpected needs. This can include essentials like food, shelter or medical expenses.

One homeless Veteran is one too many. Collaborating with local organizations, other levels of government and Veteran communities is key to addressing Veteran homelessness. Together, we can make a difference.

What you need to know for the 2023 tax-filing season

February 21, 2023

Ottawa, Ontario

Canada Revenue Agency

Millions of Canadians file their income tax and benefit returns every year. For the [2022 tax-filing season](#), Canadians filed approximately 31 million returns and 92% of them were filed electronically. Also, there were over 17 million refunds processed, resulting in a total amount of \$37 billion!

We know that having the information you need on hand makes filing easier. Below, you'll find what you need to know for this year, including what's new.

Filing and payment deadlines

The deadline for most Canadians to file this return is April 30, 2023. Since April 30, 2023, falls on a Sunday, your return will be considered filed on time if the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) receives it, or it is postmarked, on or before May 1, 2023.

If you or your spouse or common-law partner are self-employed, you have until June 15, 2023, to file on time. Filing your return before the respective deadline will allow you to avoid interruptions to any benefit or credit payments

you may be entitled to.

If you have a balance owing, your payment is due on April 30, 2023. Your payment will be considered on time if the CRA receives it, or a Canadian financial institution processes it, on or before May 1, 2023.

Register for direct deposit and file online

You can register for [direct deposit](#) and [file online](#) to get any refund you may be eligible for faster. To file online, the CRA has a list of [certified tax software](#) products that are easy to use, fast, and secure, some of which are free!

When you file using NETFILE-certified software, you may be able to use:

- [Auto-fill my return](#). This is a secure service that allows individuals and authorized representatives using certified tax software to automatically fill in parts of an income tax and benefit return with information that the CRA has available at the time of the request. This service can retrieve information from the current year and six years prior. Once Auto-fill my return has populated the return with the information, make sure that all the proper fields on the return are filled in and that the information provided is true, accurate, and complete before you file your return.
- [Express NOA](#). This is a secure service that allows individuals and authorized representatives to view their notice of assessment (NOA) directly in their certified tax software and My Account, immediately after the return has been received and processed by the CRA.

Electronic returns are generally processed within two weeks. Individuals who file online and are registered for direct deposit may get their refund in as little as eight business days. However, for paper returns, our service standard is to process them within eight weeks of receipt.

Learn about online filing, deadlines and more with our [Get ready to do your taxes](#) page.

Get free tax help

If you have a modest income and a simple tax situation, volunteers at a free tax clinic may be able to do your taxes for you. Free tax clinics are available in person and virtually. To find out if you're eligible, and to find a tax clinic, go to our [Free tax clinics](#) page.

Climate action incentive payment

The [Climate action incentive payment](#) (CAIP) is a tax-free amount paid to help individuals and families offset the cost of the federal pollution pricing. You may be eligible for the CAIP if you are a resident of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, or Ontario.

To get the CAIP, you and your spouse or common-law partner (if applicable) must each file an income tax and benefit return for the year and be an [eligible individual](#). The CRA will automatically determine your eligibility when you file your return. If you have a spouse or common-law partner, only one of you can get the

CAIP for the family. The CAIP will be paid to the spouse or common-law partner whose return is assessed first. No matter which one of you receives the CAIP, the amount will be the same.

If you are eligible to receive the CAIP, we recommend that you and your spouse or common-law partner (if applicable) file your 2022 returns electronically by March 10, 2023, to help in receiving the April 14, 2023, issuance. If you don't receive the April issuance, the payment will be included in a subsequent payment after your return is assessed.

The CAIP also includes a [supplement for residents of small and rural communities](#).

This year, you may also be eligible for the CAIP if you are a resident of Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, or Prince Edward Island. The same eligibility rules and filing requirements mentioned above will apply. You will not be eligible for the April 2023 payment because the federal fuel charge will only apply to these provinces as of July 1, 2023. If you are eligible, you will automatically receive your first payment in July 2023.

Canada Dental Benefit

Applications for the new interim [Canada Dental Benefit](#) opened on December 1, 2022, for eligible families with an adjusted family net income of less than \$90,000 in 2021. It provides financial support for parents and guardians of children under 12 years old if they receive dental care services and do not have access to a private dental insurance plan. Children already covered under another government dental program may also be eligible if the dental costs are not fully paid by that program.

Parents and guardians can apply for a maximum of two payments for each eligible child.

One-time top-up to the Canada Housing Benefit

The government introduced a tax-free [one-time \\$500 payment to help lower-income renters](#) facing housing affordability challenges. As of December 12, 2022, this benefit is available to renters who, among other eligibility criteria:

- have an adjusted family net income for 2021 of \$35,000 or less for families, or \$20,000 or less for individuals
- paid at least 30 per cent of their 2021 adjusted family net income on eligible rent for any of their principal residence(s) in Canada in the 2022 calendar year

Applications are open until March 31, 2023. To obtain the one-time payment, you need to have filed your 2021 tax return.

Please note: My Account is the quickest, easiest and most secure way to apply for the new Canada Dental Benefit and one-time top-up to the Canada Housing Benefit. You should also register for [direct deposit](#). By registering for direct deposit, your money will be deposited directly into your account at a financial institution.

Elections Canada boxes

When filing your taxes, checking “Yes” to the two questions related to Elections Canada ensures that you’re on the list of electors at your current address and ready to vote in any federal election. To register and vote in a federal election, you must be at least 18 years old and have Canadian citizenship. For more information, go to this [Elections Canada](#) web page.

What’s new on the income tax and benefit return

[Simplified Northern Residents Travel Deduction](#) – The CRA is launching the Simplified Northern Residents Travel Deduction, a pilot project to make it easier for northern residents to determine the lowest return airfare, one of the three amounts required to claim the travel deduction come tax time. Available on [canada.ca/lowest-return-airfare](#), the simplified version features tables that identify the lowest return airfare amount found from airports with regularly scheduled commercial flights to a designated city. The airfare tables contain more than 135 airports, almost all of which are located in the [prescribed zones](#).

[Disability tax credit](#) – For 2021 and later tax years, an individual diagnosed with type 1 diabetes is deemed to have met the two times per week and an average of at least 14 hours per week requirements for life-sustaining therapy.

[First-time home buyers’ tax credit](#) – The amount used to calculate the first-time home buyers’ tax credit has increased to \$10,000 for a qualifying home purchased after December 31, 2021.

[Home accessibility tax credit](#) – The annual expense limit of the home accessibility tax credit has increased to \$20,000 for the 2022 taxation year.

[Labour mobility deduction](#) – The labour mobility deduction provides eligible tradespeople and apprentices working in the construction industry with a deduction for certain temporary relocation expenses. Eligible individuals may be able to deduct up to \$4,000 in eligible expenses per year.

[Medical expense tax credit \(for surrogacy and other expenses\)](#) – The list of eligible medical expenses has been expanded to include amounts paid to fertility clinics and donor banks in Canada to obtain donor sperm or ova to enable the conception of a child by the individual, the individual’s spouse or common-law partner, or a surrogate mother on behalf of the individual. In addition, certain expenses incurred in Canada for a surrogate or donor may be considered medical expenses of the individual, if they are of a type that would be otherwise permitted as medical expenses of the individual.

[Request to deduct federal COVID-19 benefits repayment in a prior year](#) – Complete and attach Form T1B, Request to Deduct Federal COVID-19 Benefits Repayment in a Prior Year, to your 2022 income tax and benefit return to request to have the amount of federal COVID-19 benefits that you repaid in 2022 deducted on your 2020 or 2021 return or split between your 2022 return and the return for the year that you received the benefit. The CRA will then automatically reassess your return(s) to apply the deduction so that you do not need to make a

separate request to change your prior year return(s).

[Zero-emission vehicles](#) – A used vehicle may now qualify as a zero-emission vehicle and may be included in Class 54 or Class 55, provided it is acquired after March 1, 2020, and becomes available for use prior to 2028 (and meets other criteria). The capital cost allowance (CCA) rate for class 54 is 30% and the CCA rate for class 55 is 40%. For such property, a higher deduction (up to a maximum of 100%) may apply for certain eligible vehicles (phase out starting after December 31, 2023).

What's new with our services

[Disability tax credit digitalized web application](#) – The CRA has launched a fully digitalized web application for medical practitioners for the disability tax credit (DTC). This will make the DTC application process easier for persons with disabilities.

[Change My Return modernization](#) – Improvements have been made to the Change My Return service in My Account including a new layout, improved search functionality, new interfaces, and less restrictions.

[Email notification - Change My Return & ReFILE supporting documents notification](#) – When you use Change My Return or ReFILE, the CRA may ask you for supporting documents. You will receive an e-notification and a letter will be automatically generated (in the preferred official language on your file) advising that supporting documents are required. The letter will be available in the Mail section in My Account.

[Payment arrangements](#) – If you cannot pay an existing debt in full, you may be eligible for a payment arrangement. Payment arrangement options have been expanded to reflect current realities. The [Payment Arrangement Calculator](#) has also been added to My Account and My Business Account. This self-service tool allows you to submit a potential payment arrangement without having to contact the CRA. If the proposed payment arrangement does not meet the CRA payment policy, a CRA officer will reach out to complete the arrangement.

[Taxpayer self-service](#) – A new “Available payment(s)” section is available on the “Accounts and payments” page in My Account. A “Transfer payment(s)” option is available to taxpayers and their authorized representatives to transfer available payments to an existing tax balance or to a current year instalment within the Individual tax account, in real time.

[Underused Housing Tax](#) – Services for Underused Housing Tax will be added in both My Account and My Business Account for those that need to manage taxes on properties within Canada and that do not meet the usage requirements.

Protecting you from scams and fraud

To avoid scams and fraud, be aware of when and how the CRA might contact you. The [Scams and fraud](#) page provides information on the ways that the CRA may contact you, including by phone, email, mail and text message.

We strongly encourage you to monitor your CRA accounts regularly for any suspicious activity. You can find valuable information on how to secure your CRA accounts on our [Security of your CRA My Account and My Business Account](#) page.

More information

If you're looking for more information, we've got you covered! The CRA offers free national webinars on topics such as understanding benefits and credit payments, and tips on being scam smart. You can see the full list of our webinars at [Upcoming events](#). If you miss a broadcast, don't worry. All webinars are recorded and posted to [Outreach materials to print and share](#) shortly after airing.

We also have helpful benefits and credits factsheets and infographics. Check out [Outreach materials to print and share](#) for products for students, newcomers, Indigenous peoples, and more.

Contacts

Media Relations
Canada Revenue Agency
613-948-8366
cra-arc.media@cra-arc.gc.ca

NEWS IN THE MEDIA

[Special forces base expansion to include construction of a bridge across Franktown Road](#)

[Military under fire as thousands of troops face lost cost-of-living allowance](#)

[L'armée canadienne critiquée à propos de changements à la rémunération des soldats](#)

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[Canada extends, shrinks its anti-ISIS military mission in the Middle East](#)

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Base/Wing — Newspaper

14 Wing Greenwood — [The Aurora](#)

22 Wing North Bay — [The Shield](#)

17 Wing Winnipeg — [The Voxair](#)

CFB Halifax — [The Trident](#)

4 Wing Cold Lake — [The Courier](#)
CFB Esquimalt — [The Lookout](#)
CFSU Ottawa — [The Guard](#)
CFB Shilo — [The Shilo Stag](#)
19 Wing Comox — [The Totem Times](#)
8 Wing Trenton — [The Contact](#)
CFB Petawawa — [The Petawawa Post](#)

CFB Edmonton — [The Western Sentinel](#)
CFB Valcartier — [The Adsum](#)
CFB Kingston — [Garrison News](#)
CFB St Jean — [The Servir](#)
3 Wing Bagotville — [The Vortex](#)
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