

## Media Report 23 Sept 2022

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.

### Ottawa lost control of \$150 million cannabis reimbursement scheme for veterans: audit

<https://canadatoday.news/on/ottawa-lost-control-of-150-million-cannabis-reimbursement-scheme-for-veterans-audit-51027/>

OTTAWA — An internal audit by Veterans Affairs Canada suggests Ottawa has virtually lost control, spending hundreds of millions of dollars each year on veterans' medical ma.OTTAWA — An internal audit by Veterans Affairs Canada suggests Ottawa has virtually lost control, spending hundreds of millions of dollars each year on veterans' medical marijuana without proper oversight, direction, or evidence of health benefits.

The audit's findings, quietly released this week, come amid an explosion in the number of veterans applying for reimbursement for their medical pot, from around 100 in 2014 to more than 18,000 last year — and the surge has come to an end not in sight.

The result: Veterans Affairs spent more than \$150 million on medical marijuana last year — more than all other prescription drugs combined. And that number is expected to grow to \$200 million this year and \$300 million by 2025-26.

But even though demand has grown exponentially, investigators noted a continuing lack of research into the medical benefits — and risks — of veterans who use cannabis, particularly veterans dealing with mental trauma.

This has coincided with a lack of direction and control over who can obtain medical marijuana, what conditions the drug is prescribed for, and how veterans get approval for their CMP — medical cannabis.

“VAC has taken steps to operationalize its policy to allow veterans access to reimbursement for their CMP treatment,” the review reads. “However, significant gaps in internal controls in the areas of veteran health and program management remain.”

Veterans Affairs began reimbursing a small number of veterans for their medicinal cannabis in 2008, at that time permits were granted on an extremely limited basis and with the approval of a medical specialist.

The move followed a series of court decisions more than 20 years ago that provided the first legal exemption from criminal prosecution for medical marijuana use.

Then, in 2014, Health Canada relaxed its rules about who could authorize Canadians to use medical marijuana and under what conditions and circumstances. The new rules did not limit the size of the pot that could be authorized or the cost.

This change led to an explosion in claims and costs, despite the Liberal government's decision in 2016 to limit claims to three grams per day at \$8.50 per gram, with an allowance of up to 10 grams per day with medical Permit.

The reviewers noted that the limited research information available suggests that individuals should consume less than three grams of cannabis per day and have regular follow-up visits with their healthcare providers.

Health Canada and the College of Family Physicians of Canada also warn of the potential negative effects of marijuana use on individuals suffering from mental illness, particularly post-traumatic stress disorder.

However, the audit report states that Veterans Affairs has not provided any guidance or limitations as to what types of health conditions qualify for medical marijuana reimbursement.

Almost any medical condition is eligible. This includes PTSD, which investigators say was a diagnosis for "the vast majority" of veterans who were reimbursed for medicinal cannabis.

At the same time, nearly 80 percent of approvals were for three grams of cannabis or more per day, while approval letters from specialists for many veterans also "show very little evidence of a strong doctor-patient relationship."

"The follow-up recommendations were vague and used language such as 'follow-up in six months or as clinically indicated,'" the report says. "Just over half of the technical letters we reviewed did not mention any follow-up care."

That wasn't the only thing missing, as about a third of the files reviewed by the investigators contained no record of which healthcare provider actually authorized the veteran to receive medicinal cannabis. And many files were missing other data.

One of the more worrying findings of the audit was that 11 healthcare providers were responsible for approving nearly 40 percent of all medicinal weed requests, including one that approved nearly 1,300 such requests.

"There (are) a small number of CMP physician authorizers with very large exposures to experienced patients, which calls into question the soundness of medical oversight," the audit report states.

It adds, "With limited guidance available for approving CMP, there is a risk that some physicians will override the treatment."

Despite these red flags, as well as the potential risk to veterans and taxpayers, auditors found that the vast majority of reimbursement requests were approved because the department focused on ensuring access rather than monitoring and controlling them.

This included reimbursements for 45 veterans whose medical condition was listed as a substance abuse disorder and 46 who were also reimbursed for antidepressants, antipsychotics, benzodiazepines, opioids, and narcotics.

The auditors suggested the problems stemmed from the department being too focused on setting up the reimbursement process and ensuring access, noting that the entire program is managed by the equivalent of 3.5 staff.

“VAC can do more to identify potentially problematic trends in the CMP program and adjust policies to protect the health and well-being of veterans,” the report said.

“As demand for the CMP program continues to grow exponentially, VAC must properly manage resources and review the effectiveness of policies and programs.”

In response to the review, Veterans Affairs officials say they are reviewing a variety of changes related to what conditions qualify for reimbursement, limits on the daily amount that can be approved, and for what types of products.

The department is also considering a new, more detailed permit form and additional safeguards for those requesting more than three grams per day. It is not clear when the changes can be rolled out.

This report from The Canadian Press was first published on September 14, 2022.

## **National Veterans Employment Strategy consultations / Consultations sur la Stratégie nationale d'emploi pour les vétérans**

### **To: Veteran Employment Consultation Stakeholders**

(le français suit l'anglais)

It is with great pride that Veterans Affairs Canada is launching consultations to inform the development of a National Veterans Employment Strategy.

Finding employment opportunities when transitioning from the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) can be a new challenge. Our Government is committed to helping Veterans and those releasing from service with all aspects of transitioning to post-military life—including supporting them to find meaningful employment. The National Veterans Employment Strategy will set out specific actions to help connect Canadian Veterans with Canadian jobs.

To build the strategy, we want to hear directly from those with insight into Veteran employment. This includes Veterans, CAF members, stakeholder groups, family members and employers.

As the first stage of consultation, we are launching an anonymous survey for Veterans and CAF members on the Let's Talk Veterans platform that will run from August to September. We want to hear your personal perspectives, your employment preferences and any barriers you face.

Additional consultations for stakeholders and employers will take place in the coming months. I encourage you to join the consultations to share your

knowledge and influence the National Veterans Employment Strategy. Anyone with an interest in Veteran employment is also welcome to reach out with ideas for the strategy by emailing [hire-embauchez-veteran@veterans.gc.ca](mailto:hire-embauchez-veteran@veterans.gc.ca). Visit [Let's Talk Veterans](#) to participate in this and other consultations related to Veterans' issues.

The Hon. Lawrence MacAulay

Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence

C'est avec une grande fierté que je vous annonce qu'Anciens Combattants Canada lance des consultations pour éclairer ses travaux à venir en vue d'élaborer une stratégie nationale d'emploi pour les vétérans.

Trouver des possibilités d'emploi lors de la transition des Forces armées canadiennes (FAC) peut représenter un nouveau défi. Notre gouvernement s'est engagé à aider les vétérans et les personnes qui quittent le service militaire dans tous les aspects de la transition vers la vie après le service, notamment en les aidant à trouver un emploi valorisant. La Stratégie nationale d'emploi pour les vétérans établira des mesures précises pour aider à jumeler les vétérans canadiens aux emplois canadiens.

Pour élaborer la stratégie, nous voulons entendre directement ceux qui connaissent le monde de l'emploi chez les vétérans. Cela comprend les vétérans, les membres des FAC, les groupes d'intervenants, les membres de la famille et les employeurs.

Comme première étape de consultation, nous lançons un sondage anonyme pour les vétérans et les membres des FAC sur la plateforme Parlons vétérans qui se déroulera d'août à septembre. Nous voulons connaître vos points de vue personnels, vos préférences en matière d'emploi et les obstacles auxquels vous vous heurtez.

Des consultations supplémentaires ciblant les intervenants et les employeurs auront lieu dans les mois à venir. Je vous encourage à participer aux consultations pour partager vos connaissances et influencer la Stratégie nationale d'emploi pour les vétérans.

Toute personne intéressée par l'emploi des vétérans est également invitée à proposer des idées pour la stratégie en envoyant un courriel à [hire-embauchez-veteran@veterans.gc.ca](mailto:hire-embauchez-veteran@veterans.gc.ca). Visitez [Parlons vétérans](#) pour participer à cette consultation ou à d'autres consultations sur des enjeux liés aux vétérans.

L'honorable Lawrence MacAulay

Ministre des Anciens Combattants et ministre associé de la Défense nationale

## **How VAC reviews a disability benefit claim**

Learn more about how your disability claim is reviewed by the department and particularly, by the adjudicator – a trained decision-maker for disability claims.

Do we have everything?

A complete [application for a disability benefit](#) (form #PEN923AP) will have all the information needed to determine that you have a diagnosed medical condition related to your service. In this first step, we will review your:

1. [Disability benefit application](#) (form #PEN923);
2. Medical reports or CAF/RCMP health reports;
3. Medical questionnaire(s);
4. Your service health records; and if needed one or all of the following,
5. Your profile (form #VAC1055) including your proof of identify, third-party consent, and direct deposit form (form #VAC441).

Learn more about how to [complete an application](#) for a disability benefit.

Who reviews the claim?

Once your application package is complete, it is assigned to an adjudicator.

Every application for a disability benefit is reviewed by an adjudicator – who are specially-trained to review and make decisions on claims for a disability benefit. The adjudicator must base their decision on the evidence they receive. To ensure they review your claim accurately and quickly, it is very important to provide only information that clearly shows that you have a diagnosed medical condition. Your service records will confirm if that diagnosed condition is related to your service.

How is my service covered?

If your service records show that you were serving in a Special Duty Area (SDA) or Special Duty Operation (SDO) when you became ill or were injured, any disability from that service is covered by the Insurance Principle, which provides 24-hour coverage.

If you were serving outside an SDA or SDO, you will be covered through the Compensation Principle, which provides coverage for an illness or injury that occurred while you were on duty.

Assessment tools used to review the claim

If the adjudicator determines that there is clear medical evidence of a chronic or permanent disability, they must then determine:

1. Your entitlement – is the disability directly or partially-related to service?  
and
2. Your assessment – what is the severity or extent of the disability and its impact on your quality of life?

To ensure that all decisions are fair and consistent, adjudicators always use the following tools to review your entitlement and assessment:

- [Entitlement Eligibility Guidelines](#) - These policy statements are based on

evidence from peer-reviewed medical research and literature both in Canada and abroad. They help to ensure the consistency, equity and quality of decisions made regarding the relationship between your service and your disability.

- [Table of Disabilities](#) - The table is used by an adjudicator to assess the extent of a disability for the purposes of determining disability benefits. Specifically, to assess the level of an impairment and the impact that impairment has on your quality of life.
- [Medical questionnaires](#) - The purpose of a questionnaire is to support your diagnosis and supplement the information found in the Table of Disabilities.

### The decision letter

Once the adjudicator reaches a decision on your claim, you will receive a decision letter. The letter will let you know the decision and what evidence the adjudicator used to reach their decision. If they confirmed you have a service-related disability, the letter will also show your entitlement and your assessment.

If you receive an unfavourable decision, the letter will explain the reasons why your claim was not accepted. It will also provide the name and telephone number to call if you wish to discuss this decision further or to identify what evidence your claim requires to be approved. The letter will also explain your appeal rights if you believe the adjudicator has made an error in reviewing your application and supporting evidence.

### Additional information

Learn more about how to provide all the components of a [complete application for a disability benefit](#).

How long does it take to be approved for a disability benefit?

We are committed to providing a decision as quickly as possible. To make their decisions, adjudicators must use only the evidence they received. Once adjudicators have received all the information they require - complete and signed form(s), service records, medical reports and questionnaire(s) - they can usually make a decision within 15-41 weeks.

This timeframe will vary depending on several factors such as:

- the complexity of your condition,
- the complexity of the medical reports and questionnaires explaining that condition,
- how long it takes to receive service health records from DND or Library and Archives Canada,
- the level of detail (or lack of detail) in those service health records, and
- any challenges in getting other needed evidence to support your claim.

The [Wait time tool](#) provides current average wait times for receiving a decision on certain applications.

## **IN THE MEDIA**

[Queen's death gives Battle of Britain Week extra meaning this year](#)  
[Operation London Bridge: The plan for after Queen Elizabeth's death](#)  
[14 noms ajoutés au cénotaphe des anciens combattants à Memramcook](#)

[Footsteps of Canadian Heroes honours CAF Personnel](#)  
[Shamed First World War hero has honour restored in Cornwall](#)  
[Ottawa doit être plus proactif dans la défense de l'Arctique canadien](#)  
[Remembering Operation Medusa](#)  
[Ukraine is waging a new kind of war](#)

## **STAY IN TOUCH WITH THESE CF NEWSPAPERS**

### **Base/Wing — Newspaper**

14 Wing Greenwood — [The Aurora](#)

22 Wing North Bay — [The Shield](#)

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](#)

Base Gagetown — [Gagetown Gazette](#)

17 Wing Winnipeg — [The Voxair](#)

CFB Halifax — [The Trident](#)

CFB Edmonton — [The Western Sentinel](#)

CFB Valcartier — [The Adsum](#)

CFB Kingston — [Garrison News](#)

CFB St Jean — [The Servir](#)

3 Wing Bagotville — [The Vortex](#)

CFB Borden — [The Citizen](#)