



Government  
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Veterans  
Ombudsman

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January 18, 2024

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The Honourable Ginette Petitpas Taylor  
Minister of Veterans Affairs and  
Associate Minister of National Defence  
66 Slater St., 16th Floor  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0P4

**Re: The Burden of Care: A Fairness Gap in the Veterans Independence  
Program Policy**

Dear Minister Petitpas Taylor,

Further to the letter of intent sent on May 15, 2020 by my predecessor to the Deputy Minister of Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC), I am pleased to submit our findings and my recommendation from our abbreviated systemic review into the Department's benefits and programs that support care and independence at home for Veterans. This systemic review was initially launched further to several complaints and stakeholder concerns about the restrictive eligibility threshold for the Caregiver Recognition Benefit (CRB), and has since arrived at a focus on the Veterans Independence Program policy.

Background

Since 2018, our Office has received over 100 complaints about the CRB. In fiscal year 2022-2023, according to the Department's Statistics Directorate, only 35% of CRB decisions were favourable. To better understand concerns of Veterans and stakeholders about the CRB eligibility criteria, we had intended to map Veterans' service-related needs to the relevant VAC programs and benefits. As we had done in the past, we requested a random client file sample from the Department. Citing privacy concerns, VAC did not provide the random sample and we found their proposed alternative methods unfeasible.

Therefore our review was divided into two parts. First, our [Care at Home Resource Guide](#), published in October 2022, provides information to Veterans and their families about the Department's programs and benefits that enable Veterans to remain independent at home, and includes eligibility criteria. The CRB is only intended for the caregivers of the most seriously ill and injured Veterans, where that caregiving helps the Veteran to remain in their home. At the same time, the Veterans Independence Program (VIP) provides a number of benefits to assist Veterans to remain independent at home. The balance of our review focused on whether there are any significant policy gaps between the CRB and VIP.

Finding

We find that the "Relatives" section of the VIP Benefits at Home Policy creates a gap in benefits for Veterans and their families, and is also unfair to a Veteran's live-in

relative(s). The "Relatives" section requires decision-makers to consider whether the Veteran's live-in relative (connected by blood or by law) is available, able, and willing to provide VIP-funded services or assistance that the Veteran needs or cannot do themselves. If so, the Veteran will not receive funding for those VIP services, and because of the high eligibility threshold, may also be ineligible for the CRB. As a result, such Veterans may be excluded from both benefits that support care and independence at home.

Furthermore, the "Relatives" limitation on VIP-funded services unfairly transfers home upkeep tasks, as well as the Veteran's normal contributions to their own health and well-being, to their live-in relative. Everyone is expected to contribute to the functioning of their household; if one member is unable, the tasks fall to others. It is not fair to ask the live-in relative(s) to take on the work that cannot be done by a Veteran whose illness or injury is service-related.

#### Recommendation

To close this gap and rectify the unfair transfer of a Veteran's contribution to self-care and home upkeep tasks to their live-in relative(s), I am making the following recommendation for your consideration:

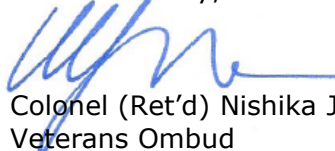
That VAC review and revise the existing policy and regulatory frameworks to eliminate gaps that create additional burdens for live-in relatives who are meeting the service-related care-at-home needs of Veterans. Options could include:

- modifying the VIP Benefits at Home Policy to ensure Veterans are not screened out of VIP benefits when a live-in relative is available, able, and willing to perform the tasks
- implementing a benefit to recognize the additional burden and responsibilities borne by all informal caregivers due to a Veteran's service-related condition(s)

As you know, we track our Recommendations and the Department's response to each in our *Spotlight* publication. *Spotlight* is an important tool to share the Ombud's work with the Veteran Community, and I seek your ongoing support to assist me in this regard with a written response to each recommendation.

Thank you for your consideration of this review of a fairness gap in the Veterans Independence Program Policy.

Yours sincerely,



Colonel (Ret'd) Nishika Jardine  
Veterans Ombud

c.c.: Mr. Paul Ledwell  
Deputy Minister, Veterans Affairs Canada

