

What's new at the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman?

The Office of the Veterans Ombudsman has launched a systemic investigation into the red tape associated with Veterans Affairs Canada processes as they relate to the application and receipt of benefits and services provided either by the Department or by third parties on behalf of the Department.

What is red tape?

For the purpose of this systemic investigation the Office defines red tape as the extent to which rigid conformity to redundant or bureaucratic rules hinders or prevents action or decision-making with the result being an unfair impact on the Veteran Community.

What is a systemic investigation?

In accordance with its mandate, the Office will research, review, investigate and analyze facts and feedback related to systemic issues with a view to identifying policy, procedures, legislation or regulations that are unfair to Veterans and then making the persuasive argument to the Veterans Affairs Canada for change. This is normally achieved, by submitting a report containing findings and recommendations on issues that affect the Veteran Community

Systemic investigations are by nature complex, both in terms of the issue(s) under review and the processes of examination. There are number of operational phases that form the basis of the investigative process including:

- Scope and define the issue;
- Gather the related facts;
- Conduct a thorough analysis; and,
- Present persuasive findings and recommendations which if adopted will serve to rectify the problems identified.

Why select red tape for the first systemic investigation?

After an initial assessment of Office case files it became apparent that the majority contained references to the complexity, redundancy of the administrative process, and highlighted the degree of frustration experienced by Veterans who applied for benefits and services. A concentrated review of 800 case files revealed that 205 files contained information where issues related to red tape formed the basis of the complaint. To date we have identified many issues of concerns such as poor communications, overly

complex application forms, duplication of efforts in applying for benefits, lack of personal contact and unsubstantiated decision letters. It is the view of the Office that Veterans applying for benefits will be positively impacted by making persuasive findings and recommendations intended to simplify requirements and eliminate processes and procedures that are redundant.

Why is public consultation important?

The Office of the Veterans Ombudsman recognizes the critical importance of addressing issues in a timely fashion. This can be achieved by thorough research, exhaustive analysis and public consultation.

In order to ensure that Office investigators have a full understanding of the issues, we are seeking input from the Veteran Community and others who might have related knowledge or experiences.

As a guide in the preparation of your comments the Office has developed the series of question below. If you wish to participate, please send your comments by letter (only) to the following address on or before **April 20, 2009**:

Research and Investigation Division
Office of the Veterans Ombudsman
P.O. Box 18, STN B
Ottawa ON
K1P 6C3

This is a consultative process, however, should you wish to raise a complaint regarding this issue or any other matter please contact our Early Intervention personnel through the contact points identified in our website.

Questions:

1. What specific encounters have you had with departmental Red Tape and why were you frustrated?
2. Based on your experiences which Veterans Affairs Canada programs, benefits and services suffer from a lack of information, lack of clarity or provide little flexibility?
3. What applications forms are difficult to complete and why?
4. Which policies or regulations have been problematic and why?
5. What types of decision take too long and why?
6. What are specific occasions when you have been asked to get additional justification that you thought was not necessary?

7. What are some examples of sound administrative procedures at Veterans Affairs Canada or elsewhere that might be useful to consider?
8. Have you been in a position where you had to mediate between Veterans Affairs Canada administration and your service provider?
9. Based on your experiences, what suggestions do you have for simplifying the application for Veterans Affairs Canada benefits and services provided directly or by third parties on behalf of the Department?