

Minister
of Veterans Affairs



Ministre
des Anciens Combattants

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0P4

SEP 26 2012

Ms. Bonnie James
Executive Director
Armed Force Pensioners' / Annuitants' Association of Canada
3-247 Barr Street
Renfrew, Ontario
K7V 1J6

Dear Ms. James / *Dear Director James.*

Thank you for your letter regarding the planned closure of some of Veterans Affairs Canada's district offices.

Our Government has been listening to Veterans and Canadians, and we are committed to providing our service men and women with the best possible care and support, regardless of where they live.

While it is true that Veterans Affairs Canada's overall spending is expected to decrease in the coming years, our Government has been very clear: Veterans' benefits will be maintained.

The Department is adjusting the way it does business to keep pace with the changing needs, expectations and demographics of Canada's Veterans. Our focus is to ensure that there are employees in the locations where they are needed most. Consequently, some offices may grow bigger, while others will get smaller or close. That said, I would like to stress that Veterans across the country can expect to receive the same level of assistance, and case managers will continue to make home visits as required.

With respect to the Department's toll-free number, allow me to explain that the National Contact Centre Network was put in place to provide Veterans and other clients with a single point of contact. This centralized system ensures that officials can respond more effectively to the approximately

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1 million telephone calls that Veterans Affairs Canada receives every year. The contact centre staff are trained to respond to questions on all benefits and services available from the Department.

Rest assured that Veterans Affairs Canada will continue to do its utmost to improve the level of service and simplify access to its programs and benefits. The Department has already streamlined the application process for many benefits, moved to upfront payments for certain elements of the Veterans Independence Program and expanded its network of case managers in areas of high demand.

Most recently, I was pleased to announce a partnership with Service Canada that provides even more options for accessing Veterans Affairs Canada's programs and services, especially for those living in rural or remote areas. Canadian Forces personnel, Veterans and their families can now obtain general information and apply for benefits at any of the approximately 600 Service Canada locations across the country.

Of course, Veterans can still access the Department's programs and services by calling its toll-free number (1-866-522-2122), by visiting its Web site (www.veterans.gc.ca) or by going to the nearest district office or Canadian Forces base.

Again, thank you for taking the time to write and share the views of your organization. I hope that the information is helpful in alleviating your concerns.

Sincerely,



Steven Blaney, P.C., M.P.

