



Salute!

Veterans Affairs Canada: Proudly Serving Canada's Veteran Community

Summer 2012

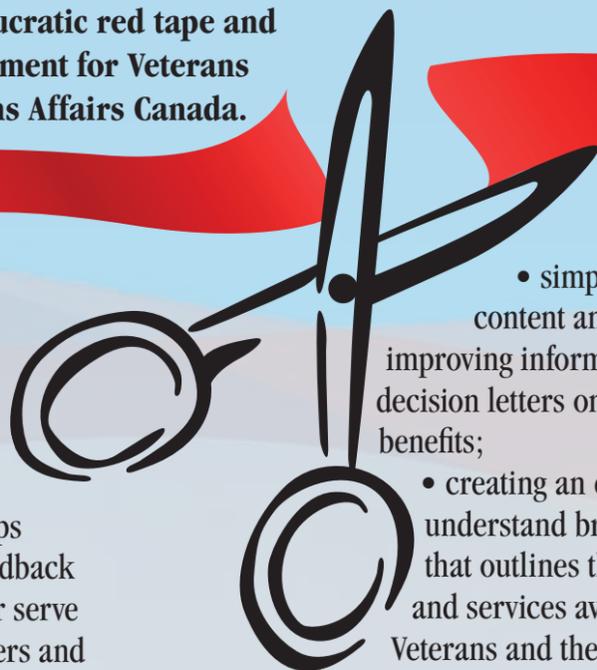
Cutting Red Tape for Veterans



Work is ongoing to cut bureaucratic red tape and provide a hassle-free environment for Veterans looking for help from Veterans Affairs Canada.

The Honourable Steven Blaney, Minister of Veterans Affairs, has been meeting with Veterans' groups across the country and getting feedback on how the Department can better serve Veterans, Canadian Forces members and their families. Veterans are saying they want fewer bureaucratic roadblocks. The Minister agrees.

Minister Blaney recently introduced a red tape reduction initiative that works to improve the way Veterans Affairs Canada communicates with Veterans, Canadian Forces members and their families. Its goal is to make policies and programs less complicated and make access to services easier. For example, Veterans Affairs Canada is already taking steps to improve its communications with Veterans, Canadian Forces members and their families by:



- simplifying content and improving information in decision letters on disability benefits;
- creating an easy-to-understand brochure that outlines the benefits and services available to Veterans and their families; and
- providing staff members with easier access to online information on programs and services to help them serve Veterans more quickly.

“Our Government believes that Veterans have the right to receive better and faster service, and to access information that is easy to understand,” said Minister Blaney. “As a government, we are determined to deliver clearer and better information on our Web site, in our letters, brochures and policies.”

In addition to these measures, Veterans Affairs Canada has already:

- improved the Veterans Independence Program so that those who receive housekeeping and grounds maintenance through the program will no longer have to submit receipts to receive financial support for these services. (See page 5)
- made it so that Veterans no longer have to submit receipts to get financial support to cover travel expenses resulting from medical appointments. (See page 5)
- reduced the number of health care benefits requiring pre-approval so that most benefits only require pre-authorization the first time a Veteran gets the benefit. (See page 6)
- reduced the paperwork Veterans have to complete for many of the health benefits provided by the Department.

As Veterans Affairs Canada continues to improve the delivery of its services, it will introduce more convenient ways for Veterans to interact online with the Department and will further improve its Web site.

For more information on the changes at Veterans Affairs Canada, visit veterans.gc.ca.

Helping You Find a Good Job

Finding a new career is one of the most important things that helps Veterans make a successful transition from military to civilian life.

The Helmets to Hardhats program, led by Canada's Building Trade Unions, will help connect Veterans, Canadian Forces members and reservists to careers within the construction industry, including apprenticeships in various building trades.

Veterans Affairs Minister Steven Blaney said the Government of Canada's contribution of \$150,000 to support Helmets to Hardhats in Canada will help those who are interested in a career in the construction industry.



Over the course of their careers, members of the Canadian Forces develop a wide range of skills, many of which are extremely valuable in the building trades. Helmets to Hardhats will help Veterans match those skills with jobs in the construction

industry. The program will also provide employers and local unions with access to a talented labour pool to fill positions from engineering jobs to trade employment contracts and apprenticeships. Helmets to Hardhats will be a fully bilingual service that can be accessed by telephone or online.

“This program is already extremely successful in the United States. We have every reason to believe that it will be extremely successful here in Canada,” said Minister Blaney.

If you are interested in the Helmets to Hardhats program in Canada, please contact Canada's Building Trades Unions, 130 Albert Street, Suite 1902, Ottawa, ON K1P 5G4, visit www.buildingtrades.ca or call 613-236-0653.



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Veterans Affairs Canada
P.O. Box 7700
Charlottetown, PE C1A 8M9
Attention: Editor, *Salute!*
or
E-mail: salute@vac-acc.gc.ca

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Minister's Message

Since being honoured by the Prime Minister with my appointment as Minister of Veterans Affairs, one of the things I have found most striking is the regard in which Canada's Veterans are held by people across the country, and around the world.

No matter where I go, or who I speak with, the message is the same . . . "please take good care of our Veterans." That is the sentiment I try to keep foremost in my mind every day. Our Veterans served Canada with pride and distinction. After their military career, most of them come home wanting only to begin a normal life, to work hard and provide for their families and their loved ones. I have dedicated myself to honouring their service by making it as easy as possible for Veterans to find a job when they return home, to receive the benefits they have earned and, for those facing difficult challenges, to get the help they need.

Even after giving so much, our Veterans simply say "I was just doing my job." When they return, it's time for us to do our job and ensure Veterans and their families have the care and support they need. It is the least we can do after what they have done for our country . . . for all of us.

As Minister of Veterans Affairs, I believe Veterans and their families have the right to receive the best possible service from the Department. Veterans told me they were dealing with too much bureaucratic red tape. They told me the information they were being provided was difficult to understand. Not only do we want the information that Veterans Affairs Canada provides to be easily accessible, we want that information to be in plain and simple language. And, that is what I have directed the Department to do.

While there is more to be done, we have had some success, as you can see from the details of what has been accomplished to date on page one of *Salute!*. Earlier this year, I launched the "Cutting Red Tape for Veterans" action plan. It will be a lot of work, but I assure you that I and the staff of Veterans Affairs Canada are up for the challenge before us. The Department is transforming. It is changing for the better, becoming more



The Honourable Steven Blaney, Minister of Veterans Affairs, and Air Commodore Malcolm White, OBE, Chairman, Bomber Command Association, admire the construction of the Bomber Command Memorial in London, United Kingdom.

responsive to the needs of those it serves. Our Veterans have fought enough battles . . . they don't need to continue to do so when they return home.

In April, I had the honour of speaking with some of the Veterans who attended ceremonies in France to honour those who participated in the Battle of Vimy Ridge. In June, I had a similar opportunity during the unveiling of the new Bomber Command Memorial in London's Green Park. This beautiful memorial honours all Allied members of the Bomber Command and those who made the ultimate sacrifice. A number of Canadian Veterans travelled with me to the unveiling and some of the conversations I had in London, and at Vimy Ridge, will stay with me forever.

To look into the eyes of those who have served Canada in areas around the world . . . to listen to their stories of hardship and success . . . to witness the pain they felt as they remembered comrades lost years ago . . . to do these things is all the inspiration one needs to ensure our Veterans receive everything they are entitled to. The same holds true for all Canadian Veterans—those who served in Korea, or as peacekeepers, or in Afghanistan. Their service, their stories and their bravery should inspire us all. I assure you, they continue to inspire me every single day.

Lest we forget.

The Honourable Steven Blaney,
Minister of Veterans Affairs

24/7

Supporting Veterans in Need

Veterans and their immediate families can access free, short-term, confidential and professional counselling services. If you are experiencing work-related issues, family or marital problems, or high levels of stress or anxiety, call the **24/7** Veterans Affairs Canada Assistance Service at **1-800-268-7708**. Trained counsellors are available to help you. If you are using a TDD machine, please call **1-800-567-5803**.

One of Canada's Greatest Wartime Achievements Remembered



Ceremonies were held in France and Canada on April 9 to recognize the 95th anniversary of one of our country's greatest wartime achievements, the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

Vimy Ridge is as an important symbol of Canada's victories and sacrifices during the First World War. The battle took place April 9-12, 1917, and marked the first time all four divisions of the Canadian Corps in France came together in battle. More than 10,600 Canadians were wounded, and of these about 3,600 died. For their heroic efforts, four Canadians earned the Victoria Cross.

His Excellency the Right Honourable David Johnston, Governor General and Commander-in-Chief of Canada, and the Honourable Steven Blaney, Minister of Veterans Affairs, joined international dignitaries, representatives of Veterans' organizations, members of the Canadian Forces, Canadian youth and members of the public in honouring those who fought and died in the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

Close to 5,000 Canadian youth took part in the ceremony by demonstrating their commitment to remember the sacrifices and achievements of Canada's Veterans and those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

Ceremonies were also held in communities across the country to remember the anniversary. In Ottawa, cadets held a vigil and Eve Adams, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, laid a wreath at the National War Memorial in honour of those who served. Representatives from Canadian Veterans' organizations, Canadian youth, parliamentarians and other special guests also took part.



Young Canadian Speaks From the Heart About Vimy Ridge

Madison Ford calls herself "a typical 16-year-old girl." A student at Bear Creek Secondary School in Barrie, Ontario, Madison gave a stirring speech at Green Park in London, England, prior to attending ceremonies in France recognizing the 95th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, along with a Canadian delegation of Veterans, dignitaries and youth.

Veterans Affairs Minister Steven Blaney was so moved by Madison's remarks, he asked her to read a letter from Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

Canadian youth participation added a very special element to the anniversary. Young Canadians played an active and important role during ceremonies in both London and France. They ended their journey with a rock concert featuring Canadian musicians, organized in celebration of what being Canadian is all about and the ideals Canadian soldiers fought to protect.

A brief excerpt from Madison's speech in Green Park is below.



Madison Ford reads a letter from Prime Minister Stephen Harper during an event recognizing the 95th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge in France.

We Canadians here today are a long way from home, but there may be no place on Earth that makes us feel more Canadian.

Nothing can tell the story of war, or can describe the devastating battles where brave soldiers fought and died. But, we have monuments, like the Canada Memorial here, that remind us of the enormity of their sacrifice and the enormity of our duty to remember the soldiers that perished in their fight for the freedom which we appreciate today.

In a few days, when we travel onwards to our French neighbours, I solemnly,

yet proudly, look forward to seeing the Vimy Memorial and commemorating the anniversary of the battle. It has been said that "a nation which ignores its past has no blueprint for the future." As a result, April 9 is a date which should be burned into the memory of every Canadian. When our soldiers answered the call in the First World War, it was to fight tyranny and oppression. Maybe our soldiers did not know it, but in addition to a great victory at Vimy Ridge, they would give us something else—a truly Canadian identity.

Please take a moment to acknowledge the bravery and heroism of the Veterans that are with us today. Extend your hand and say "thank you." Thank you for your service and for risking your life for me. Let us together listen to the final prayer of those whose sacrifice we are honouring. We may hear them say softly: I love my family, I love my comrades, I love my country and I will defend their freedom to the end.

Let us never forget their legacy. The youth of Canada do and will remember.

We Want your Feedback



We want to hear from you and get your opinions about issues important to those we serve. The more information we get, the better equipped we are to serve you.

Veterans, their families and Canadian Forces members now have an open invitation through the Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) Web site to take part in focus groups. You can check for future projects by using this link: veterans.gc.ca/eng/information-canadian-forces/opt-in.

So far, Canadian Forces Veterans, still-serving members and eligible family members have been invited to take part in two public opinion research projects taking place in various cities across Canada.

One project is looking into how much CF Veterans know about VAC programs and services, with interviews taking place in Edmonton, Halifax and Québec City. The other is looking to get opinions about some of the new online, video and print materials we are using to promote VAC programs and services. This is happening in Winnipeg, Montréal, Saint John, and Fredericton.

VAC thanks everyone who took part in the studies. In keeping with government

communications policy, projects like these contribute to the ongoing communication between the Department, citizens and stakeholders.

VAC uses professional research companies for these projects and we take every precaution to make sure your privacy is protected. If you are selected to take part in focus group discussions, the research companies provide you with a payment.

For future projects, if you live in or near the cities where the research is taking place, you only need to complete a short survey. The research firms will then contact you to talk about taking part in the survey. Every time a CF member, Veteran or family member gives us feedback on how we're doing, we are one step closer to our goal of providing you with the best possible service.

The results of the research, and all research done by Veterans Affairs Canada, are published by Library and Archives Canada. A link is available from the Web site at: veterans.gc.ca/eng/department/reports/por.



Are You a Veteran of the Korean War?

The Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs of the Republic of Korea will host the 2013 Veterans Revisit Program.

If you or someone you know served in Korea with the Allied forces (1950-1953) or as a peacekeeper (1953-1955), and would like more information on the program and how to participate, please contact:

Doug Finney, CD
Revisit Coordinator
511 - 835 Oxford Street
Oshawa, ON L1J 3W2
Tel (905) 579-0751
Fax (905) 579-0527

For more information, visit: english.mpva.go.kr/



The familiar red serge of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police was prominent during the 95th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge in France. Here, an RCMP officer leads a group of young Canadian cadets to the ceremony site.

Receipts No Longer Need To Be Submitted For Health-Related Travel



Veterans no longer have to submit receipts to get the financial support they need to cover travel expenses resulting from medical appointments.

Veterans Affairs Minister Steven Blaney said this is another way Veterans Affairs Canada is changing the way it does business, resulting in faster and easier access to benefits and services for Veterans.

“This simple change in our process eliminates cumbersome paperwork for more than 18,000 Veterans and puts their money into their hands faster,” Minister

Blaney said. Veterans Affairs Canada paid about \$18 million to Veterans for health-related travel expenses last year. The Department processes approximately 5,500 health-related travel claims each month, with an average reimbursement of \$274.

The form still has to be filled in and mailed to the Department, and receipts must be kept as Veterans may be asked to submit them at any time up to one year from when their claim was submitted. Under the old system, Veterans had to mail or drop off their receipts for the cost of travelling for treatment or medical assessments. Effective immediately, Veterans no longer need to submit receipts with their travel claim.

“Cutting red tape surrounding health-related travel is a great initiative and will make claims easier to manage for the Veterans community,” said Ray Kokkonen, National President of the Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association. “Anyone who travels to medical appointments will benefit.”

“Any change or improvement that makes the process easier for Veterans is great. We look forward to seeing more changes through this program in the future,” said Pat Varga, Dominion President of the Royal Canadian Legion.

VIP Changes to Better Meet Your Needs

Improvements are being made to the Veterans Independence Program (VIP) to ensure Veterans getting help through the program have the support they need, when they need it.

Work is presently underway that will make it possible in 2013 for the Department to provide up-front payments to Veterans who receive housekeeping and grounds maintenance services through the VIP so they will no longer have to get, track or submit receipts in order to receive financial support for these services.

The Department is making paperwork a thing of the past. Currently, in a given year,

a Veteran may have to submit multiple receipts and then wait to receive separate payments from VAC for housekeeping and grounds maintenance services.

With this new approach, we will replace reimbursements with up-front payments. This change will eliminate cumbersome paperwork for approximately 100,000 Veterans, primary caregivers and survivors currently getting support for these services. The up-front payments will be paid through two installments each year.

If you are already receiving VIP support for these services, you will receive your first up-front payment after your annual contribution arrangement expires in 2013.

You will be notified of this in writing. Until then, please continue to submit your receipts.

It's also important to note that the up-front payments are for **housekeeping and grounds maintenance services only**. If you receive other VIP services, such as personal care, you should continue to submit those receipts.

For more information about the Veterans Independence Program and how Veterans Affairs Canada can help you, please click veterans.gc.ca, call us, toll free, at **1-866-522-2122** or visit us.

Need a hand with your application for benefits? We are here to help.



Veterans can get help from Veterans Affairs Canada or from their local Legion to apply for services or benefits **at no cost**. There is no need to pay someone to help you do this.

For more information or assistance completing forms, contact Veterans Affairs Canada, toll free at **1-866-522-2122** or visit one of our district offices or integrated personnel support centres on Canadian Forces bases across the country.

We are here to help you.

veterans.gc.ca

Only One Approval Now Needed for Treatment Benefits

Veterans now have much less paperwork to complete for many of the health care benefits provided by Veterans Affairs Canada.

The number of health care benefits requiring pre-approval has been reduced and most benefits only require pre-authorization the first time a Veteran gets the benefit. These changes mean a faster turnaround time for Veterans and providers to receive payment.

More than 100,000 Veterans will have easier and faster access to the health benefits they need. For most benefits, if you have already been pre-approved and it is within the frequency or dollar limits, you or your provider can submit the claim for payment without first requesting another pre-approval.

The Treatment Benefits Program provides financial support to qualified Veterans for the health care services or benefits available through our 14 programs of choice, including dental, hearing, hospital, nursing and medical services, along with prescription drugs, eye care and many others. Also, expenses when travelling to receive treatment benefits and services may be covered.

You may qualify to receive financial support for one or more treatment benefits, if you are:

- receiving a VAC disability benefit;
- in VAC's rehabilitation program;
- taking part in the Veterans Independence Program (VIP) or the Long-Term Care Program; or
- getting a War Veterans Allowance or the Canadian Forces Income Support.

If you are a CF member in the process of releasing, please make sure you are removed from the CF Member Enrolment Systems (CFMES) so that you can begin to access VAC's treatment benefits.

If you are an RCMP member in the process of releasing, please notify your local VAC district office of your discharge date. If you are unsure which office is nearest to you, please contact us.

Updated Web Site

The treatment benefits section on the VAC Web site has been updated to give up to date information for Veterans and providers in a plain language format. Simply go to veterans.gc.ca and search "treatment benefits."



Meet One of VAC's Front-Line Service Professionals

Stephanie Ashley is no stranger to client service—and her years of experience have helped her as an Inquiries Resolution Officer (IRO) at Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC).

Below, Stephanie shares her key roles in the IRO position:

Like so many at VAC, I have a busy job, but it's very rewarding.

Every file I work on contains a legitimate issue and my job is to make sure I follow the file from beginning to end. I try to be the Veterans' one and only contact in the Department for their issue. This makes the process easier for the Veterans and helps move their files along. The best part of my job is helping ease the Veterans' frustrations and helping them with their concerns.

My typical day as an IRO includes following up with Veterans and their families, dealing with any outstanding issues and working



with a number of areas responsible for the issues identified so we can provide the best response.

The work that I and my IRO colleagues do is really a team effort. I work closely with area directors, client service team managers, case managers, treatment authorization centres, the National Client Contact Network (NCCN) and the Centralized Processing Centre. We all share a keen interest in serving Veterans and their families and providing the highest-quality client service.

Questions are directed to me from the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman, the NCCN and many other areas within VAC. We all work together to make sure the client's case is dealt with as quickly as possible. The IRO position also helps to identify problems or potential problems that can be dealt with to make sure other Veterans aren't faced with the same issues.



Minister Blaney Chooses Powerful Portrait of Afghanistan Ramp Ceremony

Corporal Joel Green watched first-hand as his powerful portrait of an Afghanistan ramp ceremony was hung in the Parliament Hill office of the Honourable Steven Blaney, Minister of Veterans Affairs.

Entitled *Slow March*, the painting features four members of the Canadian Forces carrying the casket of a fallen signal operator from Cpl. Green's unit, during a ramp ceremony in Afghanistan in 2007. Minister Blaney personally selected the painting for his office.

"Corporal Joel Green's portrait is a remarkable painting that captures, in the

faces of just four soldiers, all the emotions we feel as Canadians when we watch one of our fallen heroes brought back home," said Minister Blaney. "This painting conveys the ultimate sacrifice of our men and women in ways that mere words could never express."

"It is a great personal honour to have the Minister of Veterans Affairs choose one of my works, knowing that every time someone visits the Minister's office, they will be reminded of the terrible price we've paid to defend our shared way of life," Cpl. Green said. "But the most important thing is that this is a tribute to all the men and women who have ever chosen to serve our country."

Cpl. Green said he was inspired to paint the ramp ceremony after experiencing a "deep emotional response" to the look on the face of his good friend Private Daryl Janssen, who helped to carry Corporal Matthew McCully's casket. Cpl. McCully was killed when he stepped on an improvised explosive device in May 2007.

"I mainly painted this for our common friends, for Cpl. McCully's friends and their ability to soldier on and hold it together despite their inner turmoil," Cpl. Green said. "It really struck a chord with me and I was very proud of them."

Read *Salute!* Online and Through Social Media

Veterans Affairs Canada is continuing to improve the way it delivers information to those we serve—and *Salute!* is no exception.

The *Salute!* Web section has many interactive features to help you stay connected. You can post comments on articles and tell us where you agree or disagree with comments left by others. Between print editions, we will update our online stories more frequently, with content on our Web site that isn't available in print. We hope this will provide you with more up-to-date information, when you want it.

As our online presence increases, print editions will now be sent out twice per year, with the next one scheduled for Veterans' Week.

Salute! will also use the Department's social media presence on Facebook and Twitter to both promote our publication and post individual stories from the printed and online versions.

For those who would rather listen to than read our articles, there is an audio option on the *Salute!* Web section where you can choose a voice to read the article to you. Of course, you still have the option of receiving an audio CD in the mail by subscribing to our audio *Salute!*

If you have any questions or would like to subscribe to *Salute!*, you can do that on our Web page. Simply go to veterans.gc.ca and click *Salute!* in the left-hand menu.





Canadian Forces Members Stepping Up Here at Home

Canadian Forces members have many important duties, some of which may not automatically come to mind when we think about the work they do. We know they defend our homeland and help with our country's military obligations around the world. We also know they serve in peace support operations in war-torn places and that our brave men and women in uniform are there through it all, putting their lives on the line.

But, the number one priority of the Canadian Forces is to protect our nation. This includes guarding our frontiers—a huge job in the waters and skies off the shores of the country that has the longest coastline in the world. Canada's huge Arctic region makes the challenge even greater. The Canadian Forces must maintain a presence and demonstrate our sovereignty in the North, an area that has a small population, but which is strategically important.

Canadian Forces members also lead many daring rescue missions when ships or planes run into problems. Often dealing with severe storms or high seas, their selfless efforts save some 1,000 lives a year and help many more who find themselves in serious trouble.



One of the most visible things Canadian Forces members do here at home is to help when disasters happen. Canada is a beautiful country but our environment can be harsh.

Floods, forest fires, avalanches, ice storms, massive blizzards or hurricanes can all impact Canada, and when things go wrong and people desperately need help, the Canadian Forces has stepped up time and again.

Serving here at home in Canada can present great challenges. It is often hard, dangerous work with long days spent in difficult conditions. Bodily injuries often happen, as does mental stress caused by constantly having to be on guard, being separated from families and ready to respond to life-threatening situations at a moment's notice.

But for our Canadian Forces members, it is just part of the job—one for which all Canadians owe them great thanks.

How to Reach Us

Veterans Affairs Canada
Web site: veterans.gc.ca
E-mail: information@vac-acc.gc.ca

Do you need information on services and benefits?

Note: When you call us, please have your VAC client number ready, if you have one.

Canada:

Phone: 1-866-522-2122 (English)

Phone: 1-866-522-2022 (French)

United States:

Phone: 1-888-996-2242

United Kingdom, Germany, France, or Belgium:

Phone: 00-800-996-22421

Any other country:

Phone: 613-996-2242

Do you need information on disability benefit decisions or how to request a review or an appeal?

Call the Bureau of Pensions Advocates (BPA) at: 1-877-228-2250

Do you need information on remembrance programming?

Phone: 1-866-522-2122 (English)

Phone: 1-866-522-2022 (French)

Phone: 1-800-465-7735 (Hearing Impaired)



Veterans Review and Appeal Board

P.O. Box 9900

Charlottetown PE C1A 8V7

Phone: 1-800-450-8006

Outside Canada

Phone: 902-566-8751

Web site: www.vrab-tacra.gc.ca

Funeral and Burial Information

Last Post Fund

Phone: 1-800-465-7113

Web site: www.lastpostfund.ca

VAC Assistance Line

Confidential, professional counselling 24/7

1-800-268-7708

Office of the Veterans Ombudsman

Mailing Address:

Veterans Ombudsman

P.O. Box 18 Stn B

Ottawa, ON K1P 6C3

1-877-330-4343

Outside Canada: 902-626-2919

Fax Number: 902-566-7582

Web site: www.ombudsman-veterans.gc.ca