



FEDERAL ELECTION 2019

# OUR VETERANS DESERVE BETTER

---

**Union of Veterans' Affairs Employees (UVAE)**

For too long politicians and political parties have promised a lot and delivered less than ever to our veterans. This is unfortunately true of every party that's been elected in Canada in recent years. As we get ready for the next federal election, we know the promises to veterans are coming. Better services, more funding for families and to improve programming. Before we get to their promises, let's look at their track record while in office.

[uvae-seac.ca](http://uvae-seac.ca)

# THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY

---

Today the Conservatives promise a lot to veterans, but we have to remember what things were like before 2015. That included:

## **Closing service offices**

The Harper Conservative government shut down nine Veterans Affairs offices. They did this partially to save money, yet the same year they increased its advertising budget by more than \$4 million to buy playoff hockey ads. Harper claimed the office closures would mean better services for veterans.

## **Cutting Jobs**

The Harper government launched the largest cuts to staff at Veterans Affairs in history. When they were finished, nearly 900 jobs or about one-quarter of the staff had been cut, with some of the biggest cuts coming in the disability awards branch. In Sydney, Nova Scotia, one person was to do the work of 13 employees who had handled 4,200 clients.

## **Not spending more than \$1 billion on veterans from 2006 to 2014**

Top officials at Veterans Affairs hoarded millions of dollars allocated for veterans and returned \$1.13 billion to general revenue. This was done at the same time as veterans struggled to get their claims accepted and tried to get services they desperately needed.

# THE LIBERAL PARTY

---

The Liberals made some progress and took many steps towards reversing many of the cuts that the Conservatives made. They include:

## **Hiring New Staff**

The Liberals promised to hire 400 new service delivery staff, doubling the current planned increase. This will include much-needed case managers at Veterans Affairs. They claim that since 2016, more than 460 new employees have been hired.

## **Re-opening Veterans Affairs Service Offices**

The Liberals promised to restore access to the support that veterans are due, and re-open the nine Veterans Affairs service offices closed by the Conservatives. In the Federal Budget of 2016 they committed funding to re-open and staff service offices in Charlottetown, Sydney, Corner Brook, Windsor, Thunder Bay, Saskatoon, Brandon, Prince George and Kelowna and in May 2017 they completed that promise with the re-opening of the office in Prince George.



# WHAT'S IT LIKE TODAY?

---

Despite all of the interest and promises by political parties, veterans and their families are facing reduced services, increased wait times and a government and political system that has consistently failed to deliver. The people who work to support them are under-resourced and over-worked. The system is on life support and needs immediate attention.

## **Waitlists**

We have watched as the waitlists for veterans to find out if they qualify for financial assistance has grown from a low of 11,000 in 2018 to over 40,000 veterans today. The average wait time is now over 16 weeks. That has left veterans and their families in extremely stressful situations and has made lives difficult for them and those who are trying to serve them. Regular caseload assignment to the service standard of 12 weeks is rarely met and most cases do not even get assigned for 8-10 weeks. Requests for assistance for service-related injuries takes even longer. VAC admitted in July 2019 that the waitlist for those requests was 32 weeks. Double the published service standard.

## **Excessive Overtime**

VAC staff across the country are frantically trying to keep up with expanding workloads and are on average working an excessive amount of overtime. There are vacant positions because of staff stress and burnout and that work is being assigned to the remaining staff. This in turn creates more overtime, more burnout and more delays for our veterans. The latest number we have are that overtime costs are roughly \$2 million dollars a year for VAC across the country with many case managers working extra hours every day, both paid and unpaid, in order to service our veterans. Those monies could be better used to improve and enhance services to veterans and their families.

## **Insufficient Funding**

There have been some sporadic increases to VAC funding and the hiring of some additional staff to deal with the most serious backlogs in the system. But this so-called surge funding has only allowed the department to plug some leaks on a very leaky ship. There are still many veterans who have to wait too long and some who never receive the support and care they need until it is too late. We need solid, secure and stable funding that allows service standards to be met and that leave no current or future veteran or their family behind.

## **Collective Bargaining and Phoenix**

In addition to the challenges we face at the workplace, we also have been trying to get a new collective agreement and are facing stiff opposition from the employer at the bargaining table. We all deserve to have a free and fair collective bargaining process that results in good working conditions, a safe and healthy workplace, and a decent pension when we retire. And surely, it's not too much to ask that we get paid correctly every two weeks.



## SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK THE CANDIDATES IN YOUR RIDING

---

### **Waitlists**

What specific measures would you and your party take to reduce the waitlist for veterans and their families who apply to VAC for services?

### **Excessive Overtime**

What specific measures would you and your party take to reduce the excessive overtime at VAC and would you support the hiring of additional staff to serve Canada's veterans?

### **Funding**

Would you and your party support solid, secure and stable funding that allows service standards at VAC to be met and that leave no current or future veteran or their family behind?

### **Collective Bargaining**

Where do you and your party stand on the rights of workers to bargain freely? Would you support expanding worker and union rights in the workplace?

### **Phoenix**

What would you and your party do to fix the pay problems that have arisen through the Phoenix pay system?