

**Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services  
Arrowheads Community Club  
Fort Indiantown Gap  
Annville, PA 17003**

**February 21, 2018  
MEETING MINUTES**

1. **Call to Order:** Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller, Chairman, called the Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans' Services to order at 1:03PM.

- Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance led by Brian Natali.

2. **Introductions:** The following Council Members, Representatives, designees and others were present:

Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller, Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans' Affairs - Chairman  
COL Ward Adams - Member at Large  
Dr. Sonia Borrero - Member at Large  
Ms. Crystal Petery-Sherman - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs  
Mrs. Rosalyn Dukmen - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs  
Ms. Sherry Peters - Department of Human Services, Office of Mental Health Substance Abuse Svcs.  
Mr. Ryan Yoder - Department of Corrections  
Mr. Robert Rounce - Department of Health  
Mr. Andrew Barnes - Governor's Policy Office  
Mr. Rick Hamp - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs  
Ms. Jodi Skiles - Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs  
Ms. Christine Hawk - Department of Education  
Mr. Ruben Pachay - Department of Labor and Industry  
Ms. Sandra Patterson - Office of Administration, Health and Human Services Delivery Center  
Ms. Shelly Forte - Office of Administration  
Ms. Cheryl Cook - Department of Agriculture  
Mr. William Otis - PA Board of Probation and Parole  
Ms. Lan Do - Disability Rights Pennsylvania  
Mr. Jeffrey White - Vietnam Veterans of America PA State Council  
Ms. Dee McPherson - DMVA, Office of Administration  
Mr. Tim Irvin - DMVA, Information Technology  
Mr. Eric Felty - DMVA, Information Technology  
Mr. Brian Dysinger - Department of Conservation and Natural Resources State Parks  
Mr. Frederick Nardei, Jr. - U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs  
Ms. Jodi Zucco - Office of Attorney General  
Ms. Lisa Kaye - Monroe County Director of Veterans' Affairs  
Ms. Constance Snavelly - State Veterans' Commission  
Mr. Cory Bender - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs  
Mr. Joel Mutschler - DMVA, Policy and Legislative Affairs  
Mr. Steven Wolf - Department of Labor and Industry  
Lt. Rose Brandberg - PA Army National Guard  
Mr. Mark Todero - PA Army National Guard  
Maj. Keith McKeon - PA Army National Guard  
Mr. Chip Gilliland - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs  
Ms. Christina Kotsalus - PA Banking and Securities

Mr. Terry Stokes - PA VFW, Veteran Court Advocate  
Ms. Belinda Albright - Northumberland County of Veterans' Affairs  
Mr. Thomas Applebach - Lehigh County Director of Veterans' Affairs  
Mr. Kory Auch - Office of Administration  
Ms. Samantha Cossman - Department of Aging  
Ms. Jamie Dunlap - PA Council on the Arts  
Mr. Larry Furlong - PA Fish and Boat Commission  
Mr. Brian Natali - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs  
Mr. Ben Laudermilch - Department of Human Services  
Mr. James Fearn - Department of Aging, Office of Long Term Living  
Mr. Michael Woody - Job Advocate

### 3. **Old Business:**

- **Review and Approval of November 13, 2017 Meeting Minutes**
- **Committee Updates:**
- **Aging Committee:** Ms. Samantha Cossman, Co-chair briefed the Committee on their areas of focus. The Adult Day is currently on hold until for the construction project. There have been meetings with legislators who've expressed interest in the County Home Partnerships and the next steps will be meeting with Department of Health to discuss regulatory considerations. The committee has been exploring socialization and recreational opportunities for aging Veterans, family members, and caregivers within the Commonwealth. They have been working with Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Fish and Boat Commission to learn more about discounted licenses, activities, and upcoming events and how to promote that information through military and Veteran publications. They also will be partnering with the PA Council on the Arts to explore what programs they offer.

The Aging Committee is continuing to work on expanding PA Link initiatives for aging Veterans. They have introduced the staff at Hollidaysburg State Veteran Home to the Greater PA Chapter of the Alzheimer Association and hope to connect each of the State Veterans Homes to the various Alzheimer Association chapters to broaden the understanding when working with those residents who are living with different forms of dementia. The PA Behavioral Health and Aging Coalition has created a list of courses/trainings offered throughout the state for caregivers of those afflicted with dementia. The Department of Aging would like to pursue a collaboration between DMVA and the VISN on a regional programming to support caregivers with all the resources available.

A survey of the Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) was conducted in December 2017 with a 67% response rate which asked their familiarity of Veteran services and programs. Many requested more information on supports and services; at which point all AAA Administrators were emailed various links and educational information. The survey also asked 'at what point are the AAA's inquiring about Veteran status?' Results of this are available in the Aging Committee's portion of the PowerPoint presentation for this meeting. The goal is to encourage those offices to screen or ask the question appropriately at all points of contact. Respondents of the survey are referring Veterans to their local County Director for Veteran Affairs. The next step is to develop a plan for PA Link Regionals to help introduce the County Director and AAA Director when one is new to their position. The Committee is working with both the Area Agencies on Aging and the County Directors to strengthen those relationships.

The survey focused on Veterans Directed Care and asked the AAA Directors if they would be interested in pursuing it. Ms. Cossman would like permission from the Council to reach out to VISN 4 to inquire where their interest lies in order gain some insight into which medical centers would like to expand the Veterans Directed Program. Most AAA Directors have the information that they need on Veterans Directed Care but may need more conversations to set up the logistics of offering it. Erie and Bradford Counties have been approved through the readiness reviews and just need those partnerships with the medical centers.

The Aging Committee has partnered with the Health and Behavioral Service Committee to tackle the homelessness issue. Ms. Cossman reported on the data from the VA Healthcare Annual Homeless Point in Time (PIT) Count from January 2018. Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller explained that the State Homes are reviewing the domicile care which aids Veterans who are facing homelessness. He asked if the committee could discuss transitional housing options for those individuals to begin filtering residents in domicile care at the state homes to those other options to allow for more focus on medical and nursing care in the homes. Mr. Ben Laudermilch presented the details on the joint committee making the connection between Regional Housing Coordinators program and VISN 4 Homeless Leadership Workgroup. He discussed that the joint committee presented information and eligibility criteria for the 811 PRA Rental Subsidy and the PA Accessible Housing Program. Mr. Laudermilch explained the capabilities of PAHousing.com which assists landlords in listing units for free and that there is a statewide search engine to look for those units. The joint committee is currently compiling a list of counties where landlords are will to help house Veterans with barriers such as criminal histories, etc. The Department of Human Services has a five-year housing strategy and Mr. Laudermilch provided updates on what have been done as well as examples of the efforts for 2018. Please visit [www.dhs.pa.gov/citizens/housing](http://www.dhs.pa.gov/citizens/housing) for more information on DHS's Five Year Housing Strategy.

**Questions/Comments:** Mr. Jeffrey White asked Ms. Samantha Cossman if she knew that there are 4 counties in Pennsylvania that are not covered by VISN 4. She did confirm that she was aware.

- **Education, Employment and Workforce Development Committee:** Mr. Ruben Pachay, Chair presented that the committee has identified three tasks which they will provide deliverables in various timeframes. The first is the revamping PA Career Link Centers. There are on average over 4,000 Veterans that visit the 58 offices throughout the state. Much of the information those offices provide is inconsistent and as a committee they are planning to make recommendations to those centers on what information needs to be there for Veterans. The end result will be that each Career Link will have the same information but also have unique local services and organizational information. Mr. Pachay would like to divide the committee into subcommittees to accomplish this by July 2018. He intends to focus on apprenticeships and plans to provide information to the GAC-VS on an upcoming Labor and Industry Apprenticeship Forum in September 2018. At that event the committee will be planning to conduct Veteran dedicated workshops including some for employers on hiring Veterans.

Mr. Pachay also briefed that the committee also will be working on getting the workforce programs within L&I to correlate with each other and learn more about all 23 of those programs. The members of the committee are also interested in the expanding the Military Skills Translator and advertise it to all agencies to use. Labor and Industry is working on a referral system that all agencies will be able to use within the Commonwealth Workforce

Development System. This will allow any agency to send, receive, and track referrals to PA Career Link Offices without jeopardizing personally identifiable information and abiding by the legal requirements on information sharing. They intend to create a training tool for sister agencies to maximize the success of this tool.

**Questions/Comments:** Maj. Keith McKeon commented that the PA National Guard has developed a program called Citizen Soldiers for Life which is intended to provide employment services. While it is still in its infancy stages, Maj. McKeon wanted Mr. Pachay to be aware so not to duplicate efforts but to correlate both programs. Ms. Jodi Zucco asked how Labor and Industry plans to synchronize agencies who do not have access to that system. Mr. Pachay answered that the question was raised but they do intend to have their system send a link to notify the agency of a referral and give the opportunity for the referred agency to report back through similar means.

- **Health and Behavioral Service Committee:** Mr. Rick Hamp, Chair informed the council that on November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2017 he had the opportunity to represent DMVA at the White House. Vice President Mike Pence, Secretary Shulken, Secretary Hargan, Secretary Acosta, and Honorable Anthony Kurta Sr. were in attendance. Discussions surrounded the administration's efforts in approving healthcare services for Veterans by directing the funding to the state level. The national focus areas included service member reintegration, suicide prevention, employment initiatives, veteran homelessness, addiction and mental health, and VA modernization and reform.

Mr. Hamp presented information on the PA State Strategy for Tobacco Free Recovery which held its State Summit in Harrisburg on November 16-17, 2017. The goal is for the coalition of state and federal partners to develop a state strategy, working groups, and action plans to facilitate tobacco free recovery and provide alternate treatment methods. These working groups plan to meet on a quarterly basis.

Mr. Hamp briefed the Council on the continued success of the existing Fairweather Lodges. Lackawanna County officials are working on building a stakeholder ship for a new lodge since OMHSAS was unable to fund anymore in 2017 budget year. Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller pointed out that the self-sustaining lodge concept was shared with the private organization, New Vitae and a few similarly run lodges were opened in Quakertown area.

Community Centered Behavioral Health Clinics is a pilot program where Dr. Darryl Jackson and Mr. Rick Hamp represented Pennsylvania to promote expanded access to intensive community based services for individuals with untreated severe mental illness or addiction. These treatment clinics are the efforts of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and it offers treatment services at a new payment rate which has enabled the opening of new service lines and leverage new technologies to improve care.

In light of the Opioid Crisis, The Department of Health hosts The Warm Hand-Off for Opioid Survivors Initiative which includes Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS), Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs (DDAP), Department of Aging, and Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs (DMVA), County Commissioner Association of PA, and various community organizations including first responders, emergency room departments, physician groups, and health care insurance organizations. The goal is to ensure that training and resources are in place to provide opioid overdose survivors a variety of resources within the community to seek recovery. Various regional summits will be held throughout March and April 2018.

This year, DMVA budget has requested a line item for Veteran Behavioral Support and if awarded, steps would be taken to put out a Grant Notice of Funding Announcement. This grant would address behavioral health challenges that include:

- PTSD with co-occurring substance use disorder
- Mental Health First Aid
- Residential treatment for substance use disorder
- Partial inpatient care for substance use disorder
- Outpatient care for substance use disorder
- Housing, employment, education and other wrap around services
- Outreach services to incarcerated Veterans

DMVA is hoping to announce grant funding in May 2018.

**Questions/Comments:** None at this time

- **Women Veteran Committee:** Ms. Jodi Zucco, Chair provided a reiteration of the committee mission: to identify the issues of unique concern to Pennsylvania's 60,000 women veterans. Once they identify the issues, they will take a look at the shortfalls in the services that may exist and make proposals to create programs to address them. The primary impediment of accomplishing initiatives has been getting feedback on what the unique needs of Pennsylvania women veterans actually are. To overcome this challenge the Committee has come up with three courses of action to include a questionnaire, outreach through town hall meetings, and supplementing both of those with academic research.

At this point the questionnaire has received final approval and they are formulating a dissemination plan. The town hall/expo would be a forum for information sharing (i.e. benefits and services that are available) but also information gathering to help them get an idea on what the unique needs of PA female veterans actually are. They are looking to hold the pilot town hall/expo at the Army Heritage Center in Carlisle in the spring early summer time frame. The committee determined that Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller would be the most appropriate speaker; rather than a distinguished female veteran because Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller is in a position to potentially fix the issues of concern. Ms. Zucco asked for support of all state agencies at the town hall/expo to provide resources that may be of interest in all areas.

**Questions/Comments:** None at this time

- **Judiciary Committee:** Mr. Ryan Yoder, Chair gave an overview of what the Judiciary Committee has been working on. He has received overwhelming response to the invitation he extended to anyone interested in seeing how the State Correctional Institutes run their Veteran Service Units (VSUs). In November, Lt. Governor Mike Stack and Senator Brooks toured the newest VSU at SCI-Mercer. In December, Allegheny County Veterans Court Team and the County's Prison visited the VSU at SCI-Mercer where Judge Zotolla expressed his interest in collaborating with the Department of Corrections (DOC) to create a voluntary reentry preparation program that would act as a continuation of the reentry programming and services offered by the DOC. On January 10, 2018, Pennsylvania's Adjutant General for

Military and Veterans Affairs, Maj. Gen. Anthony Carrelli brought his leadership team to tour the VSU at SCI-Houtzdale, speak with Veterans and VSU staff.

Mr. Richard Podguski has been working with representatives from various counties who have Veterans Courts to identify the best practices between these court programs. The recurring themes are the commitment among judges, probation officers, defense counsel, district attorneys, and treatment providers; the availability of funding resources, and the support of Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC). There will be an update provided at the next meeting on the information that Mr. Podguski compiles.

Mr. Yoder had the opportunity to represent the Department of Corrections in Washington D.C. through Lieutenant Governor Mike Stack's Pathways to Pardons. The program is all about second chances and include veteran services. The representatives at the conference are interested in making Pennsylvania's Pathways to Pardons a national model for all states.

The Greater Harrisburg YWCA hosted a Homeless Veteran Stand Down from January 19-21. The Department of Correction employees provided a variety of personal items and set up a recruiting table. Mr. Yoder expressed that this is the 12<sup>th</sup> year that the YWCA has held the event and that it was very successful.

Mr. Yoder shared information about the America's Vet Dogs' Prison Puppy Program. On January 23, 2018 SCI-Dallas celebrated the graduation of two of their dogs. These dogs provide U.S. Military Veterans and first responders with a chance to live a life without boundaries.

**Questions/Comments:** Ms. Cheryl Cook asked where the dogs come from that go into the training program. Mr. Yoder replied that the dogs come from a national organization but unfortunately the trained dogs are not guaranteed to be placed with Pennsylvania Veterans. Ms. Cook expressed that she would like to have further discussions with the DOC about this because the Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement finds unwanted dogs all throughout the state.

- **Office of Administration/Information Technology Committee:** Ms. Sandra Patterson, Chair briefed the council that the committee has added its members to support two main initiatives; the Veterans Registry and implementing a 3-digit calling number for suicide prevention. They have completed the project charter and requirements to implement the Registry changes as required by House Bill 1231. The testing has been going very well and they are going to launch the updates to the Veterans Registry on February 22, 2018. They have broken the tasks down into 4 phases to complete the Veteran Registry, which can be found in the OA/IT Committee slides.

Ms. Patterson explained that they have been working with the SPEER Committee to supply information on establishing a 3 digit Veteran Crisis Line in Pennsylvania. They have researched PennDot's PA 511 cost information as a comparative. The OA/IT Committee's next steps are to work with OAOIT Enterprise to evaluate capability within PAI for account creation, collect business requirements for the upload of DD214s from the Veteran Registry, and collect and validate the documents and create a business process for using the DD214 within sister agencies to determine a clear direction for phase 4.

**Questions/Comments:** None at this time.

- **Suicide Prevention-Peer (SPPEER) Committee:** Mr. Rick Hamp, Chair presented that the Suicide Prevention-Peer Committee is comprised of several subject matter experts on suicide prevention including services members from the PA National Guard. The committee has decided to divide into subcommittees to tackle different focus areas while continuing to work closely together.

Lt. Rose Brandburg briefed that she and Mr. Mark Todero are working on the Community Awareness and Communication subcommittee. They work alongside the other subcommittees for the communication piece and have also been working with local partners for the community awareness piece. Some of these collaborative efforts include American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's Out of the Darkness Walks and various task forces. They have been in contact with the New Vitae facility and the representatives from New Vitae would like to sit on the SPEER Committee to aid in the community awareness efforts.

Ms. Sherry Peters shared that the Prevention and Treatment Services subcommittee consists of 12 to 15 people whose goal is to identify and create a resource list of services available. The list would start with a Crisis section followed by Screening, Prevention, and Treatment Services which would explain who each service is for and how they are implemented. The committee is finalizing the list and the next step is to form a dissemination plan.

Mr. Fred Nardei explained that his subcommittee is working on identifying the barriers in retaining transition information for service members. There are many transition programs out there, but they are extremely varied so they are trying to streamline the information out there. They are working on a database of suicide prevention trainings for providers, family members and caregivers of Veterans. The next step is to build a database of community behavioral health providers that have military culture competence trainings. Mr. Nardei's subcommittee has also been working with Ms. Sandy Patterson on the implementation of the 3-digit suicide number.

**Questions/Comments:** Mr. Jeffrey White commented that he has reached out to VISN4 regarding a new PTSD treatment method that he has seen a video on. Currently there is one VA hospital that is testing it to cure PTSD and military sexual trauma. If anyone is interested in the video, please contact Mr. White.

#### **4. New Business:**

- Mr. Brian Natali addressed that House Bill 1231 was enacted in December 2017 and created Act 69 which are improvements to the Veterans Registry. Part of the requirement is that state agencies are to help gather information which section 51 Pa C.S. §712(b). There are also Coordinating Instructions so that all state agencies know what is expected of them in gathering information. For these instructions or more information, please contact Department of Military and Veteran Affairs or visit our website.

**Questions/Comments:** Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller asked if we are going to be able to distribute these instructions to the secretaries of all state agencies. Mr. Natali affirmed that Mr. Dusty Durand and his team are working on that. Mr. Jeffrey White asked if the Registry was for any Veteran. Mr. Natali explained that the Registry is for any Veteran, any caregiver/family member, or any agency that provides assistance to Veterans.

Dr. Sonya Borrero asked that everyone be cognizant of the unique needs of women Veterans among all the committees' initiatives. One example she gave is that while a Veteran may face housing issues, many female Veterans face even more limited options as they also have children.

Maj. McKeon noted that while there are a plethora of services available for Veterans, many PA National Guard members have 20 years of service but are still not considered a 'Veteran' by the requirement guidelines of those services. It is an issue they face when a service member comes to them for help, many times the resources can't be utilized because of a lack of Title 10 service. Mr. Rick Hamp commented that many of the state level partners has taken steps to ensure that those service members who've never deployed or activated are also assisted.

5. **Next Meeting Date:** Wednesday, May 16 from 1:00PM to 3:00PM, at Arrowhead's Community Club, Fort Indiantown Gap.
6. **Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 2:52PM

The minutes of this meeting are respectfully submitted by: Crystal Petery-Sherman,  
Administrative Officer, OVA