



Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services

MEETING MINUTES
MARCH 4, 2020 1:00-2:59PM
Arrowheads Community Club, Fort Indiantown Gap

COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES IN ATTENDANCE

Maj Gen (R) Eric G. Weller, Chairman Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs	Kory Auch, Office of Administration
Andrew Barnes, Governor's Policy Office	Col (R) Ward Adams, Member at Large
Denise Verchimak, Dept of Education	Donna Hess, Dept of Human Services- OMHSAS
Jeff Geibel, Dept of Drug & Alcohol Programs	Jamie Dunlap, PA Council on the Arts
Larry Furlong, Fish & Boat Commission	Christina Kotsalos, Dept of Banking & Securities
Kurt Myers, PennDOT	Kevin Longenecker, Dept of Aging
Terrell Martin, DCED	Cheryl Cook, Agriculture
Richard Podguski, Corrections	Ruben Pachay, Dept of Labor & Industry

COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES NOT IN ATTENDANCE

Maj Gen Anthony Carrelli, The Adjutant General	Sam Petrovich, State Veterans Commission
John Vento, Member at Large	Kit Watson, PWVC
Teresa Osborne, State Civil Service Commission	Dr. Levine/Doug Snyder, Dept of Health
Cindy Dunn/John Hallas, DCNR	

OTHERS PRESENT

Linda Handley	Constance Snaveley, State Veterans Commission
Sierra Bilous, OMHSAS	Lisa Kaye, Monroe County VA
Althea Cirillo	Mark Pugliese, DMVA
Samantha Cossman, DMVA	Brian Natali, DMVA
Janette Krolczyk, DMVA	Margo Coleman, DMVA
JoAnn Tresco, State Military Family Services	Nicholas "Chip" Gilliland, DMVA
Lori Quigley, PennDOT	Joel Mutschler, DMVA
Dr. Noretta Kime, PA Air National Guard	Don Poligone, DCED
Tim Irvin, DMVA	Evelyn Chianelli, DCED
MSG James Upton, Army Recruiting Command	Joe Spevack, PA Bar Association
Randy Wright, US Dept of Labor	Jessica Penn Shires, OMHSAS
Dusty Durand, DMVA	Sam Estrada, DMVA
Jessica Sherlock, DMVA	Seth Benge, DMVA
Tom Applebach, Lehigh County VA	Andy Simpson, Assoc. of PA Courts
Jonathan Bowman, Office of Long-Term Living	Marilyn Kelly-Cavotta, Moravian College
Laura Cunningham, Retreat Behavioral Health	Leslie Neal, Elk County VA
Dr. Darryl Jackson, DMVA	Joan Nissley, DMVA
Katie Reibsane, DMVA	Rick Hamp, DMVA
Terry Stokes, VFW-Dept. of PA	Mark Toderro, State Military Family Services
Amanda Daynowicz, Dept of Labor & Industry	Veronica Kneal, Dept of Labor & Industry

Ginny Mastrine, OMHSAS	Rich Krankota, Crawford County VA
Janice Mazzitti, OVR	Norm Marden, Office of the Attorney General
James Fearn, Office of Long-Term Living	

<p>CALL TO ORDER, INTRODUCTIONS AND WELCOME</p>	<p>The Governor’s Advisory Council on Veterans Services was called to order at 1:00PM. Maj. Gen. (R) Eric Weller led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance and Col (R) Ward Adams led the group in a moment of silence/quiet reflection. Seated members or designees at the table introduced themselves, which was followed by opening remarks from General Weller. He then welcomed everyone and thanked the group for their work in breaking down silos and improving services for veterans by working together. He also shared statistics demonstrating the benefits of the synergy established within the GAC-VS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This past year the Dept of Education assisted 30,000 veterans; CareerLinks assisted almost 7,000 veterans; there were over 1,000 government hires; vocational rehab through the Dept of L&I assisted 1,700 veterans; and, five new veteran courts were opened. ▪ Through PA VETConnect and the connections with the GAC-VS, veterans will benefit from a network of key linchpins working together and sharing information throughout the commonwealth. Additionally, best practices or areas of concern will be identified and shared to ensure that resources are placed where they are needed, or the subject matter experts can work on any potential issues that are identified. ▪ Through the partnership with DDAP, DMVA was able to refer multiple organizations to State Opioid Response (SOR) Grant funding, in which seven of those organizations were just awarded money this past week, which totaled \$1,000,000. DMVA was also able to refer AOPC to the SOR funds to assist with costs associated with starting a Veterans Court.
<p>APPROVAL OF NOV 19, 2019 MINUTES</p>	<p>No questions or corrections were noted on the draft minutes. A motion was made by Maj Gen (R) Weller to approve the minutes, seconded by Col (R) Adams, and unanimously approved.</p>
<p>AGING COMMITTEE AND EXPANDING LONG-TERM CARE OPTIONS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mrs. Samantha Cossman began by providing a brief update on the counties of the commonwealth that have identified Elder Justice or Elder Abuse Task Forces. Mrs. Cossman stated the importance of ensuring that veterans or their advocates have representation in those meetings. ▪ Mrs. Cossman also provided an update on the partnership that DMVA has with the PACE program through the Dept of Aging. There has been outreach through PACE to veterans who have signed up for the Veterans Registry who stated that their information could be shared with other state departments. So far there have been about 200 veteran applications that have gone through the PACE enrollment center. An average of \$4-6,000 a year is being saved by the individuals who have gone through the PACE program. ▪ Dr. Darryl Jackson stated the Veterans Homes utilize the PACE program to assist with the cost of patient prescriptions and co-payments.

- The Aging committee is in the process of being reorganized. Dr. Jackson will be Co-Chairs along with Mr. Kevin Hancock and Mr. Jonathan Bowman for the Aging Committee as the Expanding Long-Term Care Options Committee will be absorbed into other committees.
- PA VETConnect is key to expanding services to as many veterans as possible throughout the commonwealth, in addition to coordinating with other state agencies for improved accessibility to, and awareness of, those services.
- Many offices/departments/subject matter experts (SMEs) were involved in the Expanding Long-Term Care Options Committee and the report that was generated.
- Dr. Jackson explained that seniors are wanting to stay in their homes as long as possible, so there is a large need for the home and community-based services that will allow an aging individual to stay at home longer. DHS has the Waiver Program and the Dept of Aging has the Options Program, both of which provide funding for community-based services, but not everyone is aware that these programs exist. PA VETConnect will be able to provide awareness of all the various programs that exist, including Aid and Attendance, Medical Foster Home Program, LIFE, etc. There are plenty of programs that provide federal reimbursement that could benefit many community individuals.
- The cost of assisted living facilities is about half the cost of a nursing home, but there is no reimbursement funding for assisted living. This is typically paid for out of pocket or through long-term care insurance, so there would need to be a funding stream to offer assisted living with services typically found in a nursing home, but for less cost.
- Homelessness and Hard to Place conversations will pick up with the Homeless Committee going forward. Additionally, DHS is already looking at the Hard to Place cases, so more will come on that topic.
- Veteran-centric facilities are key to ensuring that veterans feel comfortable when obtaining care. Sensitivity training for providers may help bridge this gap. Federal qualified health centers assist low-income or insured people and there is at least one in every county. Through PA VETConnect, outreach is being done with these centers to see if they can expand medical services to veterans going forward. Currently, those centers are assisting about 15-17,000 veterans.
- Veterans suffering from behavioral health issues are more likely to stay in treatment when they have a peer-to-peer experience. Also, the establishment of a peer-to-peer program for families would be beneficial considering that when a veteran is suffering, so are their families. Behavioral Health issues will require a funding stream. Although DDAP is offering some funding currently, there will need to be a permanent solution in the future.
- Having a good relationship with the VA is necessary to educate the state agencies about what programs are available to veterans and what eligibility requirements there may be. DDAP has assisted with SOR money to help the counties serve the uninsured or underinsured mental health/drug and alcohol sufferers.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Approximately 400,000 Pennsylvania veterans are over age 65, but only about 1-200,000 veterans are getting some type of benefits or services from the federal VA. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ General Weller asked if the Expanding Long-Term Care Services to Pennsylvania Veterans report can be posted or shared. Dr. Jackson stated that it can be shared with everyone on the GAC-VS. ➤ Mr. Andrew Barnes commented that there have been many successes regarding PA VETConnect and each agency should be thinking about the resources databases, tools or connections points could be shared with DMVA to ensure that lines of communication remain open and information can be added to the program for improved service for veterans.
<p style="text-align: center;">JOINT COMMITTEE ON HOMELESSNESS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mrs. Samantha Cossman stated that the committee will be expanding as they will have more representatives from the Continuums of Care (COC). ▪ Committee goals include building relationships with community partners, identifying and addressing any service gaps that may exist, analyzing data from all parties and finding best practices to effectively end veteran homelessness. ▪ COCs and the SSVF grantees are the subject matter experts, so developing those relationships and ensuring everyone on the topic is talking together in one forum is crucial to developing innovative solutions. ▪ PIT Count data for 2019 stated that (an estimated) 857 Pennsylvania veterans experienced homelessness on any given day. This number serves as the current benchmark. 2020 PIT Count data has not been released yet. ▪ Samantha stated that the committee will still need to speak with a few remaining COCs, SSVF grantees and determine who from VISN 4 will be participating. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ General Weller commented that Mrs. Cossman is one of the first hires for PA VETConnect and asked if she could share a crazy experience. ➤ She stated that in her travels it is surprising how many people have no idea about the difference between the Federal VA, the PA Dept of Military and Veterans Affairs, and the County Directors for Veterans Affairs. There are many community providers that need to be educated on how many of the veteran-related pieces fit together. ➤ General Weller explained the importance of sharing information with stakeholders and educating all parties so that providers are aware of ways to increase federal dollars to offset county or state costs and assist the largest number of veterans possible. PA VETConnect will allow that information sharing to be achieved. ➤ Andrew Barnes stated that over the last two years, \$15,000,000 of SOR funding has been available specifically for addressing homelessness. DHS has been working with community providers for individuals suffering from opioid use and disorders who could possibly be eligible for homeless vouchers. Homelessness is a priority for the Governor, and it is an area that they would like to continue to fund. DHS and DCED are both stakeholders and should be involved with the committee.

**EDUCATION,
EMPLOYMENT,
WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT
COMMITTEE**

- Mr. Kory Auch welcomed the new members of the committee that were in attendance for the first time and went on to explain that each quarterly meeting will touch on one of the four options of what a veteran may want to do when he/she has been discharged from the military. This quarterly segment focused on veterans who may want a new job or have a skill that they want to utilize in the civilian world.
- Mr. Ruben Pachay explained that his office is responsible for the employment and training services that are offered to veterans at the 57 comprehensive centers throughout the commonwealth. They operate under the workforce investment opportunity act which help to fund most of the programs at the PA CareerLink offices.
- PA CareerLinks are not state owned. The Department of Labor & Industry is a partner of the PA CareerLink system, but each CareerLink office is governed by one of 22 local workforce boards.
- Veterans are given priority treatment when they seek services at a PA CareerLink office. “DVOPs” and “LVER” are funded to assist the veterans that are the hardest to serve. For the past two years, it was difficult to maintain full staffing, but there are currently a DVOP and LVER at every PA CareerLink location throughout the commonwealth.
- Over 50% of the CareerLink employees are veterans, which veterans seeking services find comforting.
- Training dollars are available to assist with higher education or helping a veteran to obtain a certificate or license, if needed. This can also work in conjunction with the veteran utilizing any GI Bill monies that he/she also may have available.
 - General Weller thanked Mr. Pachay for ensuring that all the necessary DVOPs and LVERs were hired. In the General’s experience, those individuals are very enthusiastic about helping veterans and every position is needed.
- Mr. Auch explained that over the past year and a half there were consolidation of offices throughout the commonwealth and he had many conversations with Maj Gen Carrelli regarding veterans’ preference, as he wanted to ensure that veterans hiring was not jeopardized. Mr. Auch reported that with only 4% of Pennsylvania’s workforce being veterans, the numbers show that many veterans obtained jobs last fiscal year and the preference is working as intended.
- SB 952 has been proposed to update archaic language in Title 51.
- Along with veterans hiring, last year was the first year for the recognition of state employees with military service. There were many ceremonies in which 14,000 pins were distributed to employees. This will be an annual event going forward, but will solely focus on anyone not previously pinned, or any new veterans that were hired in the different agencies that need to be recognized. This also opens the door for proper tracking of these veterans so that the commonwealth can ensure they know about all the benefits they may be eligible for, etc.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ General Weller thanked Mr. Auch for his assistance in working through challenges faced by DMVA in trying to hire individuals that take care of veterans in the veteran homes. ▪ Mr. Randy Wright, State Director for the US Department of Labor, briefed that the VETS office of the Department of Labor works with various grants to take care of jobs for veterans staffing, homeless veteran reintegration, incarcerated veterans transition programs, female homelessness, homeless veterans with families, etc. ▪ Mr. Wright’s office also investigates claims from service members who feel they have been discriminated against. ▪ The Hire Vets Medallion Program was established after the Hire Vets Act was signed in 2017, requiring that the Secretary of Labor establish a federal works program which recognizes private employers for their recruiting, hiring and retaining of veterans. In 2019 over 400 employers have applied for, and received, an award under this program. ▪ Materials for marketing the program exist on the site: HIREVETS.gov ▪ Mr. Auch finished by stating that at their next EEFD committee meeting, members will be discussing where the veteran-friendly employers are throughout the commonwealth and will be ensuring the RPOCs and CareerLink locations all have that information.
<p style="text-align: center;">HEALTH PROMOTIONS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Donna Hess briefly summed up the committee’s mission and vision by explaining that the main goal is to foster relationships and build resource awareness in the communities, as well as identify best practices and export them. ▪ Ms. Hess explained that the federal partnerships and ongoing efforts include various training opportunities and resources covering aspects of mental health, virtual medical care, and outreach to newly transitioned service members, among other items. ▪ The “Governor’s Challenge” is a collaborative approach to suicide prevention. Pennsylvania was one of six states that have accepted this challenge, which will bring together multiple partners acting as one team responsible for developing action plans for suicide prevention among service members, veterans and their families. There has been a meeting at Fort Indiantown Gap and a week-long session in Washington, DC which helped to develop next steps in the process. ▪ The Health Promotions Committee also stresses the importance of spreading awareness to the PA National Guard members via resource fairs and various trainings. ▪ Ms. Hess stated that the National Guard Bureau is providing Star Behavioral Health Training to providers who assist service members, specifically National Guard members. The goal is to have providers trained in military cultural competency to ensure the service member feels comfortable obtaining services from those providers going forward. ▪ Ms. Hess explained that for some of the available trainings, the SOR funding can be utilized as a service member or veteran may have a co-occurring issue, such as a mental health diagnosis along with a substance use issue.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ General Weller commented that through the community partner relationships that are being developed, we now know of many local organizations assisting our veterans, and through working with them, they have been able to help on a larger scale in addition to garnering more federal reimbursements, allowing for scholarships being offered to veterans in some cases. ➤ Ms. Hess thanked General Weller and the department for starting up PA VETConnect and getting that program running. Although still in the early stages, it has already proven to be beneficial, as many community partners want access to the resources to spread awareness and it was spoken highly of at the SAMHSA event in Washington, DC by the Federal VA representative. ➤ Dr. Jackson asked if there was a way to get the Star Behavioral Health information out to everyone on the GAC-VS, as this would help spread awareness to providers and promote cultural sensitivity. ➤ Ms. Janette Krolczyk asked if there was any plan at the agency level to roll out or promote the suicide intervention/prevention trainings, as many individuals on the GAC-VS work for, with, and alongside veterans, so understanding the warning signs would benefit a large number of commonwealth employees. ➤ Ms. Hess explained that the data measures and plans have been discussed and the committees she sits on will be working on targeting the suicide problem areas, so more will come on that topic ➤ Mr. Barnes stated that the suicide prevention task force report should be out by mid-May and encouraged everyone present look at what their agency can do to educate individuals on combatting the suicide issue. Mr. Barnes explained that over half (about 1,000) of the gun deaths in Pennsylvania are suicide deaths. He also shared that mental health components exist as part of insurance plans, so making sure everyone knows that resources exist is also key. ➤ Col Adams asked about the veteran numbers of the suicide statistics. ➤ 70.9% of those gun violence suicide deaths are veterans.
<p>WOMENS VETERANS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Lisa Kaye briefed that Ms. Jodi Zucco recently stepped down as Chair of the committee. She introduced Ms. Linda Handley who has an extensive military background and is the Secretary of the VA’s Advisory Board for Women Veterans, which will bring considerable expertise to the committee. Ms. Marilyn Kelly-Cavotta was also a new addition. She works for Moravian College where she is the Director of Veteran and Military Affairs and will be recognized this year at the Women Veterans Day at the Governor’s Mansion on March 25, 2020. ▪ Ms. Kaye explained that mitigation efforts continue by seeking out groups of women veterans and current research on issues or challenges that women veterans face. ▪ The advent of PA VETConnect has greatly assisted the community as groups are seeking out information from Ms. Kaye and others regarding presentations and event participation.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Kaye presented at the Bucks County Veterans Expo (Parx Casino) back in November. The event was well attended and beneficial for sharing information on every topic relating to veterans. Ms. Kaye offered to share details with anyone who was interested in setting up a vendor table at the next expo. ▪ Focus groups on Military Sexual Trauma (MST) continue to meet and the information generated will be shared with health care providers and women veterans.
<p>JUDICIARY COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Richard Podguski explained that his Co-Chair, Mr. Ryan Yoder, was conducting training and could not make the meeting. Mr. Yoder will miss the next GAC-VS meeting as well. ▪ Mr. Podguski noted that Mr. Yoder has been asked twice to participate at various roundtable discussions for the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) in Washington, DC. The first centered around PTSD and the second discussed veteran suicide. Mr. Yoder has also been interviewed for a NIC publication coming out in late May, discussing Veteran Service Units (VSUs). Recidivism rates for the VSUs are much lower than the general population due to the wrap-around services and cognitive interventions that are provided. ▪ While Senator Regan’s roundtable discussions focus on veteran suicide, a secondary topic centers around the stigma of being a veteran and not feeling comfortable seeking help. ▪ Centre County has asked for information regarding starting a veterans’, or problem solving, court. Mr. Podguski provided some data and a meeting was held a few weeks ago for preliminary discussions on this topic. ▪ Mr. Andy Simpson, from AOPC, added that there are several counties interested in starting a “veterans track” which functions like a veteran court but utilizes resources already in place. He stated there is current legislation out there that could make it easier to open veterans’ courts regionally and help the transfer of participants. ▪ Mr. Simpson updated the council that there was a VJO training event at the end of 2019, which was part of their veteran court state-wide strategic plan. At the end of the month there will be a two-day symposium for all coordinators of veterans’ courts/problem solving courts in Hershey. ▪ Two scholarships were just offered to every veterans’ court team in Pennsylvania, totaling 50 spots to attend the national conference in California at the end of May. A state-wide event for all veterans’ courts is currently being planned for later this year. ▪ There will be a Veterans Services Event at Widener on September 18, 2020 and will be broadcast by PCN. This event will need the support of members of the GAC-VS to brief as subject matter experts. ▪ Another item on the veterans’ court strategic plan is the development of posters that can be published state-wide in all the magisterial courts, courthouses, etc., to help identify the veterans going through the court system. ▪ Mr. Podguski briefed that there will be a meeting on March 9 with representatives from the VA to discuss having representatives from the

	<p>VA coming into the state institutions and perform Compensation and Pension (CAP) examinations on veterans who are maxing out or are paroling prior to their physical release of the facility.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ General Weller asked Mr. Simpson about four more counties who have reached out for information regarding starting up veterans' courts: Cumberland, Perry, Juniata, and Huntingdon. Mr. Simpson stated that he is working with those areas. ➤ General Weller asked Mr. Podguski if they can work together on a one-page information paper regarding the VSUs. General Weller knows that he was in touch with a few counties to share information about setting up a VSU, so he asked if there was a plan to move forward with that, as DMVA can assist in advertising that information to other groups like the County Commissioners, etc. ➤ Mr. Podguski knows that some county facilities have veteran units in place. There isn't a plan to move forward currently, but Mr. Podguski stated that the group can certainly get together and work on that initiative.
<p>NEW BUSINESS/ GOOD OF THE ORDER</p>	<p><u>PA VETConnect Update:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Joel Mutschler provided a brief on the successes of PA VETConnect and explained that all five Regional Program Outreach Coordinators (RPOCs) have been hired and are actively working in his/her respective region. ▪ Mr. Mutschler shared metric totals on the RPOC interactions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 131 Federal, State, County and Local Official engagements ○ 109 County Director engagements ○ 48 engagements with the Continuums of Care/SSVF representatives ○ 85 engagements with non-profit organizations ▪ PA VETConnect is all about collaboration and relationship building, which is successfully being accomplished, along with building out the resource and referral tool, which many partners have already asked for. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ General Weller added that most of these numbers can be attributed to the first two RPOCs that were hired, as the last three have only been on the job for a very short time. ▪ Mr. Mutschler also stated that the US Department of Veterans Affairs has joined as a partner of DMVA on the PA VETConnect initiative. As a result, the VA Medical Director in Lebanon has offered up some staff to assist with various IT projects and communication continues with the social workers across the VISN. ▪ Copies of the PA VETConnect document have been provided for anyone interested. Questions can be directed to Mr. Mutschler on anything related to the initiative. <p><u>Law Enforcement Update:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Janette Krolczyk shared that at the last meeting, Mr. Barnes suggested that a member of law enforcement be represented on the Judiciary Committee. Mr. Mark Pugliese, himself a retired police chief, recently made positive contact with the Pennsylvania Chiefs of Police Association.

	<p>There was interest in having someone join the Judiciary Committee, so details will be forthcoming.</p> <p>General Weller thanked everyone on behalf of himself and Maj Gen Carrelli for all the work being done to break down barriers as it relates to caring for veterans.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Next Meeting: May 20, 2020 1:00-3:00PM Arrowheads Community Club, Fort Indiantown Gap</p>
ADJOURNMENT	The meeting was adjourned at 2:59PM.

NEW ACTION ITEMS

#	ACTION	STATUS
1	DMVA: Ms. Krolczyk to share the Expanding Long-Term Care Services report to the GAC-VS, prior to next meeting in May 2020.	Completed
2	DMVA: Ms. Krolczyk to share the Star Behavioral Health information to the GAC-VS prior to the next meeting in May 2020.	Completed
3	DMVA to work with Mr. Podguski to develop a one-page info paper on the Veteran Service Units in the correctional facilities.	Pending

OLD ACTION ITEMS

#	ACTION	STATUS
1	DMVA to work with Judiciary Co-Chairs to research a law enforcement representative who could sit on the Judiciary Committee.	Pending