

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
VETERANS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON REHABILITATION (VACOR)**

COMMITTEE MINUTES

April 5-6, 2023

Field Virtual Meeting
Phoenix Regional Office and VA Healthcare System

ATTENDEES

Committee Members Present:

1. Nate Todd – Chair
2. Dr. Jennifer Martin – Co-Chair
3. Dr. Franco Santos
4. Dr. Terri Pogoda
5. Michelle Peterson
6. Tiffany Drain
7. Lawrence Rhone
8. Jacquelyn Brietenstein
9. Robert Hines
10. Dr. Lisa Ottomanelli
11. Lorenza Hilliard
12. Dr. Christina Dillahunt-Aspillaga

Ex-Officio Members Present:

- John Milam
- Dr. Kristi Hill
- William “Bill” Metheny

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Staff Present:

- LeGuster Seawright, DFO
- David Smith, DFO

Public Attendees: None

Tuesday, April 4, 2023

Welcome/Opening Remarks:

Ms. LeGuster Seawright, Designated Federal Officer (DFO), opened the meeting.

The official meeting began at 11:00 a.m. on Wednesday, April 4, 2023.

Mr. Nate Todd, VACOR Chair, welcomed the Committee members and stated the purpose of this meeting is to review any gaps in assisting Service members transitioning to civilian employment. Mr. Todd proceeded with the roll call for attendance.

The agenda was reviewed, and rules of engagement presented by David Smith, ADFO. Dr.

LaTonya Small, Program Analyst, Office of the Secretary
Briefed the committee with the Federal Advisory Committee Act and the purpose of the VACOR committee.

Mr. Nate Todd, VACOR Chair
Introduced the Phoenix Regional Office (RO) Director, Mr. David Norton.

Mr. David Norton, Phoenix RO Director
Briefed the Committee with an overview of the Phoenix RO to include the number of Veterans served.

VACOR Briefings:

Ms. Sabrena Schmella, Veteran Service Center Coach (VSC)

- Transition Assistance Program (TAP) briefings are facilitated by contractors which includes interagency initiative to ensure Service members have a smooth and successful transition to civilian life.
- TAP briefing locations: Luke Air Force Base and Davis-Monthan, Fort Huachuca and Yuma Ground and Marine Corps Air Station Yuma.
- Transition Outreach locations include Phoenix VHA Medical Center, 32ND VHA Clinic, VA satellite offices and Vet Success on Campus (Arizona State University), Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) Phoenix Regional Office (RO), Maricopa County Phoenix Veterans Court, US Vets Homeless Transitional Housing, Yuma Veterans Center and Northern Arizona VA Healthcare System.
- Warrior Training Advancement Course (WARTAC) – A skill-bridge education and employment opportunity for wounded warriors and transitioning Service members to complete a national level VBA training program while still on active duty. The

participants learn the skill-set of a rating Veteran Service Representative (RVSR). Successful completion leads to an employment opportunity at 55 of VBA's 56 regional offices.

Ms. Nichelle Wilder, Phoenix RO Director's Office Analyst

Transitioning Service members Community Impact

Be Connected

- A statewide effort to strengthen access to support and provide resources for the 600,000 and plus Service members, Veterans, and their families who call Arizona home. Joint effort between the military, government, and community. Representatives present at TAP briefings for Arizona State and Military Installations.
- The Door 2 Door Program is a response to specialty transportation needs in rural communities to have a safe, no-cost, door to door ride to and from VA medical appointments.

Mr. Roger Laskowski, VR&E IDES Counselor, Phoenix RO VR&E Outreach

- IDES Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) provides outreach and transition services for Service members going through the IDES program. IDES VRCs partner with the military units to improve Service members awareness of VA benefits.
- IDES VRCs engage Service members early to help identify skills, needed and opportunities to use their skills for employment. Services range from comprehensive rehabilitation, evaluation to support services, to obtain and maintain employment.

Mr. Michael Short, Regional Contact Center Manager. Suicide Hotline

- Suicide hotline partnership with VA Crisis Line National Suicide Prevention Hotline. The goal is a warm transfer and potential suicide call procedures are put in place.

Public Comments:

None

Ms. Sabrena Schmella, VSC Coach, Veteran Treatment Court

- Partnership between municipal court, prosecutors' office, public defender's office and VA. The goal is to restore Veterans to successful, contributing community members by helping Veterans contact specific programs to address root causes for behavior. VA coordinator is present at hearings.

Summary/Wrap-up:

The working session began with selecting Jennifer Martin as Vice Chair of VACOR, with Nate Todd serving as Chair.

Meeting was adjourned at 3:00 pm EST.

Wednesday, April 5, 2023

Welcome/Overview:

Ms. Seawright opened the meeting with a video message from VA Secretary, Mr. Denis McDonough.

Mr. Todd opened the virtual floor with an overview of the day's agenda and opening discussion.

Mr. Todd introduced the Acting Associate Director of Patient Care Services, Ms. Lynn Schneider, who provided a leadership overview.

VBA Briefings:

Mr. Michael Leon, Housing and Urban Development (HUD)/ Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH), Coordinator

Phoenix VA Health Care System provides Health Care Services throughout Central Arizona. Ten community-based outpatient clinics in the following towns/cities: Gilbert, Globe, Mesa, Good year, Maricopa, Payson, Phoenix, Scottsdale, Slow Low and Surprise.

Ms. Stephanie Glitsos, Program Manager of Military 2 VA

Roles and Responsibilities:

- Collaborate with Department of Defense (DoD) and other community partners to facilitate Service member/Veteran transition into the VA system
- Facilitate VHA enrollment and initial appointment scheduling for Service member/Veteran
- Screen Post 9/11 era Service members and Veterans for high risk factors and need for case management services
- Provide case management, transition and reintegration assistance
- Engage community partners, conduct outreach and deliver education
- Participate in Service member/Veteran events, such as Yellow Ribbon events and TAPS

Referral Sources for Military 2 VA: VA Liaisons for Healthcare embedded in or virtually supporting Military Treatment Facilities; Post9/11 Case Management Screening Report;

Warrior Care Network; In Transition Program (DoD); VA Solid Start, Internal VHA Programs, Community Partners, Self-Referrals, and VBA.

Mr. Billy Kyles, Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) Program Manager, CWT Programs provided at the Phoenix VA

Transitional Work (TW)

- Pre-employment program where Veterans are placed into real life work assignments within the medical center.
- 6 months
- 68 full & part-time shifts
- 13 service lines
- Veterans receive OJT
- Earn wages of \$15 per hour
- Learn/practice/improve work skills
- Program capacity is 100
- Supported Employment (SE)
- Community Based Employment Services (CBES)

Supported Employment (SE)

- Evidenced based and recovery-oriented
- Veterans with serious mental illness
- Obtain and maintain competitive employment
- Work in jobs they choose, while receiving services & supports they need to be successful on the job
- Services are time-unlimited
- Integrated with mental health treatment
- Program capacity is 75

Community Based Employment Services

- History of sporadic employment
- Difficulty finding & maintaining jobs
- Rapid job search, job leads, connect Veterans to community-based Veteran friendly employers
- 90 days of steady employment
- Services are time-limited to 3+ months
- Program capacity is 70

Ms. Jeanette Devevo, Social Worker Suicide Prevention Phoenix

VA Suicide Prevention

- Veterans Crisis Call support
- High risk flag monitoring
- Outreach, VA trainings, community partnerships
- Processing of suicide deaths, updates of data to national office

- Reporting/analytics/measurements for local and national office

Outreach, Trainings, Community Partnerships

- Suicide Prevention (SP) team does minimum of 5 community outreach events each month
- SP team sends letters after follow-up care and High Risk Flag (HRF) deactivation
- Training with new employees, specific clinic needs
- All Veterans should have minimal suicide screening annually
 - Positive suicide screening requires a detailed assessment same day appointment, safety plan, and consult if HRF criteria or high acute/high chronic (varies with other factors)
 - Fallout reports submitted to providers and leadership when these are not met
- SP team participates in varying committees within VA (i.e., disruptive behavior, safety, women's council, Veteran resource centers, coalitions).

Note: The SP team realizes that not all Veterans receive services at VA; therefore, they meet regularly with community partners to collaborate on identifying and filling Veteran needs.

Processing Suicide Deaths

- Office of Mental Health Suicide Prevention (OMHSP) protocols are followed for documentation and charting of deaths by suicide with varying levels of administrative oversight.
- Information pertaining to care received, diagnoses and treatment is uploaded to national databases, including engagement with others, and background information.
- Chart and peer reviews are done within VA and national offices to learn more about how to prevent suicide deaths.

Public Comments:

- None

Working Session:

Discussions:

- Finalized recommendations to prevent Veteran suicide by including in the voice message, "In the event you are experiencing suicidal thoughts, please dial 988 and press 1" on every VBA voice message.
- Update all VBA contact information on the websites; the numbers are now incorrect, outdated voice messages or no one is answering. False information causes delay in services, therefore, increasing frustration among Veterans.

- Individual Unemployability (IU) – discussed whether the Committee would like to recommend a change to the term IU. The Committee is considering delaying any recommendations related to IU right now.

Recommendations Proposed to Consider:

- Recommendations to prevent Veteran suicide by including in the voice message, “In the event you are experiencing suicidal thoughts, please dial 988 and press 1” on every VBA voice message.
- Recommendation to require all VBA contact information on websites; the numbers are now incorrect, outdated voice messages or no one is answering.

Next meeting:

Preparatory Virtual Meeting scheduled for Tuesday, June 1, 2023, 11:00 a.m. EST to 2:00 p.m. EST.

Second Annual Meeting is scheduled for August 1st – 3rd, 2023 at the Washington, DC Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) Service office.

Meeting was adjourned at 3:05 p.m. EST.

Submitted:

/s/

Ms. Jennifer Martin
VACOR Chair

May 19, 2023

/s/

Mr. David Smith
Alternate Designated Federal Officer

May 19, 2023