



**The Veterans Advisory Committee on Rehabilitation
Annual Comprehensive Report
Fiscal Year 2022**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Subjects

Letter from the Advisory Committee Chair..... 3

Part I

Executive Summary..... 4

Part II

Summary of 2022 Recommendations.....5

Part III

VACOR 2022 Recommendations and Rationales 5

Part IV

Advisory Committee Biographies..... 10

Part V

Charter... 20

Subjects. Letter from the Advisory Committee Chair



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
Veterans Benefits Administration
Washington, D.C. 20420

November 8, 2022

Denis McDonough
Secretary of Veterans
Affairs 810 Vermont
Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough:

As Chair of the Veterans Advisory Committee on Rehabilitation, it is my privilege to submit to you the FY22 Annual Comprehensive Review and Recommendations of the Veterans Advisory Committee on Rehabilitation (VACOR), in compliance with 38 U.S. Code § 3121.

The current Committee includes a team of members with diverse backgrounds and experiences reflecting the Veteran population. The members' varied perspectives on the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) rehabilitation programs, public and private sector experience in the fields of rehabilitation medicine, vocational guidance, vocational rehabilitation, employment, and training programs bring richness to our discussions and expands our scope on rehabilitation services.

The FY 2022 Recommendations reflect the Committee's outstanding concerns for the rehabilitation and employment needs of Veterans. This includes the assessment of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRC) partnerships, recruitment, and retention with a special focus on higher education and equitable VRC positions.

The Committee appreciates your staff's diligence in providing updates and information as we strive to meet our mission of advising you on the administration of rehabilitation programs for Service Members, Veterans, and their dependents.

Thank you for your consideration of this report, and we look forward to learning of any recommendations you may have in response to our report. If additional questions or information is needed, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely

/s/
Emily L. Kimmett, Chair
Veterans Advisory Committee on
Rehabilitation (VACOR)

Part I. Executive Summary

The Veterans Advisory Committee on Rehabilitation (VACOR) fiscal year (FY) 2022 Annual Comprehensive Review provides the Committee's observations, recommendations and rationales that address the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) effectiveness in addressing the rehabilitation needs of Veterans. The report also provides VA's responses and an action plan to address the FY 2022 VACOR annual recommendations.

VACOR is authorized by 38 U.S.C § 3121 to advise the Secretary on the rehabilitation needs of Veterans with disabilities and on the administration of VA rehabilitation programs.

The goals of the Committee were fully met for FY 2022. During this fiscal year, the Committee held one virtual meeting. During these meetings, the Committee members reviewed current VA rehabilitation programs and practices and received input from customers, partners and key stakeholders on new policies or changes to existing VA policy. Committee members were also provided with briefings on VA and other rehabilitation related programs and innovative services for Veterans with disabilities to include the following:

- Collaborating between the Veteran Benefits Administration (VBA) and Veterans Health Administration (VHA);
- Reviewing Equitable Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRC) and Rehabilitation Counselors (RC) positions;
- Expanding Higher Education and Federal Partnerships; and
- Identifying Recruitment and Retention strategies for VRCs.

Common themes identified by all presenters were the needs to enhance internal VHA and VBA collaboration, as well as external collaboration with national and local community partners; particularly as it relates to recruiting VRCs and partnership with other Federal agencies.

In April 2022, VACOR conducted a virtual field visit to the Indianapolis Regional Office and health care System. In August 2022, a virtual working session was held. The cost for these two meetings in FY 2022 was \$146,435. VACOR consists of 16 members, five ex-officio's and three Designated Federal Officers, who meet additionally throughout the year to prepare for their two annual meetings. Due to the Coronavirus Disease of 2019, VACOR was unable to meet in-person.

The Committee strongly believes that if implemented, the recommendations identified in this report will significantly enhance VA's ability to effectively deliver comprehensive rehabilitation services to Veterans with disabilities. The recommendations and rationale in the report addresses the issue of requirements for VHA and VBA to cross-collaborate the sub-agencies within the VA to advance the recruitment and retention for RCs and VRCs.

The Committee's recommendation is instrumental in helping VA maintain awareness of the needs encountered by Veterans with disabilities

Part II. Summary of Recommendations

In April 2021, VACOR conducted a virtual field visit to the Boston VA Health Care System (VAHCS) and the Boston Regional Office (RO). VACOR continued to examine the staffing challenges, recruitment and retention issues for VHA RCs and VBA VRCs during their August 2021 meeting.

In April 2022, VACOR conducted a virtual field visit to the Indianapolis VAHCS and the Indianapolis RO to continue examining RC and VRC recruitment and retention, including a concentrated focus on higher education and Federal partnerships and equitable RC and VRC positions.

Part III. VACOR Recommendations, Rationales and VA Responses

Recommendation 1:

That the Secretary of VA expands formal partnerships with postsecondary institutions that offer master-level Rehabilitation Counseling degrees with an increase of Memorandum of Understandings (MOU) by 15% annually across VBA Districts and VHA VISNs. Additionally, increase partnership with the U.S. Department of Education Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). This will increase the number of students aware of, interested in and eligible to work at VA and will expand the number of qualified VRCs by the end of FY 2025.

Rationale:

Educational institutions (faculty, administrators and students) and VA employees (line staff and hiring managers) indicated during meeting briefings that partnership building with institutions of higher education has been instrumental to recruiting and employing new VA VRCs. The VA Office of Academic Affiliations has approved funding for Rehabilitation Counseling training internships for FY 2023-2024.

Where there are strong partnerships with institutions, there is strong recruitment and hiring of VA VRCs. VHA's Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) program could benefit from more training internships and VBA's VR&E program would benefit from training internships.

Partnerships with higher education institutions will also improve several recruitment challenges related to graduates not looking at the USAJOBS site for job postings and student misconception that only Veterans qualify to work at VA. The Committee believes that the VA should have a more intentional, systematic, top-down prioritization to collaborate with educational institutions with Rehabilitation Counseling programs. The

number of VRC graduates who opt to seek employment with VA will increase significantly by targeting all geographic regions and schools serving minority student populations such as Historical Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions and Tribal Colleges.

The Committee further encourages the VA to consult with and engage in partnerships with other Federal departments and agencies such as the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), Department of Labor (Veterans Employment and Training Service and the Office of Disability Employment Programs) and the Department of Health and Human Services (Administration for Community Living). These and other like-programs have strong mission synergy with the VA and a shared programmatic focus toward improving (employment) outcomes for Veterans. Collaboration and consultation with these agencies will allow the VA to learn from their experience and leverage their existing affiliations.

The Committee learned from RSA that there were brief discussions between VA and RSA collaborating to build a larger network of institutes offering Rehabilitation Counseling programs and basic skills of blindness training approximately ten years ago. The VRC workgroup strongly recommends consulting with and/or collaborating with RSA, as there is a shortage of qualified VRCs throughout the country and several entities, including the VA, State VR agencies (private for profit and private non-profit agencies) are competing for the same staff. Implementing these recommendations by the VA could be done in a way that increases the supply of qualified VRC staff and does not damage or create opposition from other federal partners.

VA VRC staff serve an integral role in helping Veterans transition from military to civilian life by guiding and supporting Veterans' goals to become employed through retraining, education, job preparation, placement, retention and/or business-planning, assessing employment accommodations and independent living services. The VA is experiencing a shortage of qualified VRCs who meet the educational requirements as set forth by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management.

Additionally, there is a shortage of qualified VRCs with military competence applying through the VA's Human Resources Center. One option might be to create a VRC skill bridge program to allow Service members who are transitioning into civilian life to participate in a career-training program during their last 180 days in the military.

This could be a VA pathway into higher education using the Post 9/11-GI Bill, VR&E or the Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program (VRRAP). Other agencies provide incentives for students to major in courses that the agencies require. For example, the U.S. Army has the health care Professional Scholarship Program (HPSP) which pays tuition, cost of educational supplies such as books and a monthly stipend. The HPSP is available to medical students, psychology students in their Ph.D. program, veterinarians and chaplains. In return, recipients of the HPSP program agrees to serve a number of years in the Army equal to the number of years they received the scholarship.

VA Response: Concur in principle. The expansion of academic relationships with rehabilitation counseling programs falls under the authority of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Office of Academic Affiliations (OAA). OAA will release a request for proposals to create paid rehabilitation counseling trainee positions in VA medical facilities. The number of paid trainees coming to VA would be contingent on the availability of supervisory rehabilitation counseling staff, as well as the geographic proximity of academic rehabilitation counselors (RC) programs. Therefore, while the intent is to stand up a number of these programs, the metric itself should not be adopted, as it is not controllable by any central means. Also, please note that VA medical facilities establish affiliation agreements and not memorandums of understanding, with academic affiliates.

VHA agrees that an expansion of the formal partnerships with postsecondary institutions and the U.S. Department of Education Rehabilitation Services Administration is critical to increase student awareness of interest in and eligibility to eligible to work at VA.

VHA's Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Service Program office, located in the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, has initiated the implementation of actions to increase awareness among postsecondary institutions about RC employment at VA and to increase partnerships with postsecondary institutions. VHA VR supports engagement in a more intentional, systematic, top-down prioritization to collaborate with educational institutions with rehabilitation counseling programs. In addition to collaboration with OAA on the implementation of RC training programs in the 2023/2024 academic year, additional actions taken to-date by VHA VR include the following: presentations at national conferences; publications in national journals; presentations for master's level rehabilitation counseling students; participation on the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) workgroups to increase awareness of the certified rehabilitation counselor (CRC) credential; and the creation of a weekly email sent to points of contact for the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs accredited RC programs of www.usajobs.gov postings to share with students and alumni. VHA VR has also encouraged greater inclusion of RC positions in VHA's Psychosocial Rehabilitation Fellowship Program.

For the future growth of the candidate pool, additional efforts are necessary to raise awareness of RC amongst bachelor's degree-level students, as they select majors and consider graduate level degrees. Additionally, numerous states do not offer accredited RC academic programs. A partnership with RSA to expand the number of schools offering accredited RC programs and to encourage existing non-accredited programs to pursue accreditation, would help ensure access nationally to qualified RC candidates. The Encouragement of Move2VA collaboration presentations at the Transition Assistance Program meetings and encouraging the expansion of VHA vocational rehabilitation services that work with Veteran students helps to increase awareness of RC as a career option.

Recommendation 2:

Veteran Readiness and Employment leadership in VBA and Vocational Rehabilitation leadership in VHA should collaborate and review both administration's RC and VRC positions to identify, define and justify similarities and differences in compensation and duties to minimize competition between VBA and VHA. VACOR requests an updated report or briefing by September 30, 2023, to include the following areas:

- Grade Series (GS) promotional opportunity differences (VHA GS 9/11 vs. VBA GS 9/11/12)
- Job family (series) 0101 in VBA and VHA and 1715 in VHA
- Position Description Qualifications and Education
- Supervisory responsibilities
- Inconsistencies in Certification requirements, continued education and associated reimbursements

Rationale:

A comprehensive review of RC and VRC positions within the agencies will support VBA and VHA efforts to maintain high-quality counselors in both administrations and decrease the migration of RCs from VHA to VBA. VRCs possess graduate degrees in Rehabilitation Counseling, making them distinctively trained in providing comprehensive rehabilitation assessments of clients considering barriers, challenges and opportunities.

VRC grade series promotional opportunities are more favorable in VBA than VHA, creating vacancies in VHA Compensated Work Therapy programs. For example, non-supervisory Job family (series) 0101 VRCs leave VHA GS 9/11 positions for VBA GS 9/11/12 positions. VHA RC positions do not require the specialized training that is extremely beneficial when providing rehabilitation services. VHA vacancies result in less support for Veterans receiving vocational rehabilitation services until these positions are backfilled.

VA Response: Concur. VHA established a requirement for a CRC certification in the hybrid title 38 GS-101 Rehabilitation Counselor Qualification Standards, released in 2020. This occupation is separate and distinct from the title 5 Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist (VRS). VHA agrees with the recommendation that Veteran readiness and employment leadership in the Veteran Benefits Administration (VBA) and vocational rehabilitation leadership in VHA should collaborate and review VHA RC and VBA VRC positions to identify, define and justify similarities and differences in compensation and duties to minimize competition between VBA and VHA. As noted, VHA compensated work therapy (CWT) experiences vacancies resulting from RCs leaving VHA for VRC positions in VBA.

VHA VR has preliminary plans for fiscal year (FY) 2023 to review the existing GS-101 RC qualification standards and the GS-1715 VRS series for needed revisions that have been noted since release of the RC qualification standards in 2020, to better align these

series with one another and with VBA. A review of the VHA RC and VBA VRC positions is an important component of this.

Recommendation 3:

The Secretary of VA should identify VBA ROs and VHA CWT programs with retention and recruiting challenges. Once identified, the VA should provide additional incentives to GS 9/11/12 series 0101 and 1715 for hard to fill positions. The Committee advises that this recommendation be addressed in consultation with the Department of Education (Rehabilitation Services Administration) by the end of FY 2025.

Rationale:

The VA should provide educational benefits, tuition assistance, academic stipends, paid VA internships, initial Certified Rehabilitation Counselor Certification with the understanding of recipients securing employment with the VA to recruit qualified prospective employees. RSA in the Department of Education provides funds to support master's degrees in Rehabilitation Counseling and other rehabilitation-related fields to support RSA grantees, the State VR programs that are part of the public VR program.

Regardless of collaboration, the VA may consider combining university support with incentives to attract students, including military service personnel separating from military service, such as paid internships or hiring individuals at lower pay grades while they complete their program. Muskogee and Montgomery Regional Offices currently offer this initiative, and it should be implemented VA-wide. The VA might also consider offering paid field experiences to introduce students to the VA work setting. VR&E should model successful recruitment initiative to improve recruitment and retention.

To retain RCs and VRCs, VA should develop stronger VHA and VBA relationships to decrease variability, enhance the loan forgiveness program, provide relocation assistance, hiring bonuses, bonuses for RC and VRC referrals, remote work, retention bonuses at years 5/10/15/20/25, reimbursement of continuing education units and outline ways to enhance job quality and work-life balance.

VA Response: Concur in principle. VHA agrees with the recommendation that the Secretary of VA should identify VBA regional office and VHA CWT programs with retention and recruiting challenges and once identified, VHA will consider additional incentives, as appropriate, for GS 0101 rehabilitation counselors (RC) and GS-1715 vocational rehabilitation specialists (VRS) hard to fill positions.

VHA identifies rehabilitation counselors and vocational rehabilitation specialist as hard to fill occupations, as this is a small discipline with fewer full-time employee equivalent in comparison to other VHA occupations such as nursing, social work and psychology. The ability to identify these locations based on difficulty to fill vacancies (rather than the number of vacancies) and to target recruitment incentives is important. VHA VR has met with the Workforce Management and Consulting Employee Incentive and

Scholarship Program (EISP) leadership and implemented early actions to target the use of this program by meeting with the two medical centers that did identify this occupation on their difficult to recruit list and through a presentation on the national EISP call. Additionally, VHA VR had initial meetings with the leadership of the Office of Workforce Management and Consulting Recruitment. A national plan for approval and implementation of the recruitment incentives is needed. In VHA, RC positions are often not prioritized for facility-based recruitment incentives, making national support and awareness essential. Also, encouraging the utilization of non-competitive hiring authorities for interns and hybrid title 38 candidates.

VHA established a requirement of CRC certification in the hybrid title 38 GS-101 Rehabilitation Counselor Qualification Standards released in 2020. National certification by CRCC as a CRC is the industry standard for the discipline. CRC certification provides verification of the attainment of counseling and rehabilitation-specific knowledge and skills through academic coursework; clinical experience and a national exam; and ongoing continuing education. However, an inequity between VBA and VHA's ability to reimburse employees for the CRC exam and certification fees now exists, as VA Directive 5015, Employee Learning and Professional Development, prohibits the reimbursement of costs to obtain or maintain licenses or certifications that are a basic requirement of the position. As a result, these costs are reimbursable for VRCs in VBA, but not for RCs in VHA. The reimbursement of certification costs is an important recruitment and retention incentive.

VBA and VHA offer CRCC continuing education units (CEU) to facilitate ongoing education of the VBA VRCs and the VHA RCs. This is an important feature for VRC/RC retention as CEUs are required for CRC certification renewal. The VHA VR has implemented a workgroup to increase the number of VHA trainings that offer CRC accreditation for CEUs, as this accreditation is omitted by most VHA trainings due to the more cumbersome process and longer accreditation-request submission requirement by CRCC in comparison to other common accreditations in VHA (social work, psychology and so forth). VBA, VHA and the Institute for Learning Education and Development collaboration with CRCC is needed to address this barrier. Additionally, initial steps have been taken between the VHA VR and the VBA Veteran Readiness and Employment Program regarding access to each other's CRC accredited Talent Management System trainings.

Part IV: Advisory Committee Biographies

Veterans Advisory Committee on Rehabilitation (VACOR) Committee Members

Special Government Employees (SGE):

Ms. Emily L. Kimmett (Chair)

U.S. Army Veteran

Ms. Kimmett is a service-disabled U.S. Army Veteran who served on active duty from 1994 to 1998 as an electronic warfare signals intelligence, voice interceptor, 98G (Spanish) at Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. Ms. Kimmett earned her bachelor's degree in Social Work from the University of West Florida and a master's degree in Public Administration from Troy State University at Fort Walton Beach, FL utilizing the VR&E program. During this time, Ms. Kimmett also participated in the work study program and as an intern with VR&E. Ms. Kimmett's work experience includes business and proposal development, project management, government procurement/acquisition, special operations, cyber security and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. Ms. Kimmett is also the widow of an U.S. Air Force specialist operations flyer. She enjoys meeting with other Service members and families that care for America's wounded warriors.

Mr. Nathaniel Todd (Vice Chair)

U.S. Army Veteran

Mr. Nathaniel Todd is a member of the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) who brings nationwide prospective and knowledge to the successful achievement and career attainment of disabled Veterans through the experience of NASDVA leaders. Mr. Todd is a systems and program improvement leader and manager with success in finding, sharing and implementing best practices across major systems and inter-governmental agencies. Mr. Todd has a demonstrated track record of past assignments with the Army Medical Department, Department of Defense (DoD), Veterans Affairs Veterans health care Administration, State Government and DoD/VA Integrated Disability Evaluation System.

Mr. Adam Popp

U.S. Air Force Veteran

Mr. Adam Popp is a service-disabled U.S. Air Force Veteran who served on active duty from 1997 to 2009. Mr. Popp earned his bachelor's degree in Psychology from the American Military University and a master's degree in Education and Human Development from George Washington University. Mr. Popp's work experience includes positions as a counselor, mentor, business partner and program manager for for-profit and non-profit organizations related to serving the Nation, Service members and fellow Veterans. Mr. Popp's experience coupled with his academic background in counseling to support others through the challenges of rehabilitation, recovery, reintegration and transition demonstrates his commitment to living a life of purpose and service.

Mr. Robert Hines

U.S. Air Force Veteran

Mr. Rob Hines is the Director of the Washington State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). Mr. Hines holds a Master of Arts degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of Arkansas – Little Rock and is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor. Mr. Hines began work at DVR in 2014, when he was

appointed as DVR's Region Two Administrator, having relocated from the Phoenix, Arizona area. In Arizona, Mr. Hines worked for a private not-for-profit organization, where he was the program lead for Supportive Services for Veteran's Families, a VA funded program. Prior to working at the private foundation, Rob managed multiple field offices for Rehabilitation Services Administration in Arizona, where he also previously served as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. Prior to his time in Arizona, Mr. Hines and his family lived in Anchorage, Alaska, where he served as an Employment Service Manager for the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development. In this role, Mr. Hines managed the State of Alaska's largest One-Stop Job Center. One of Mr. Hines' most proud accomplishments was the 10-year period he spent as an enlisted member and non-commissioned officer in the United States Air Force. Mr. Hines served his Nation during the Gulf War and enjoys promoting Veterans' issues, as well as those in the disability community.

Dr. John Milam
U.S. Army Veteran

Dr. John Milam is a U.S. Army, Vietnam Combat Veteran. Dr. Milam earned a master's degree in political science and a master's degree in Business Administration from Wayne State University. Dr. Milam earned his Doctorate in U.S. History from the University of Houston. Dr. Milam is the Executive Director of the Institute for Peace and Conflict (IPAC). IPAC is part of the College of Arts and Sciences and includes the world-renowned Vietnam Center and Archive – the largest non-governmental archive on the Vietnam War. As a Veteran of the Vietnam combat and a Professor of Military History, Dr. Milam attracts many of the 1,500 Veterans of Texas Tech University (TTU) to his classes. Dr. Milam is heavily involved in Veteran issues; as the founder and faculty advisor of the TTU student Veteran's Association, he has dealt with Veteran rehabilitation issues as both a professor and mentor.

Ms. Katheryn King
U.S. Army Veteran

Ms. Katheryn King is a service-disabled U.S. Army Veteran who served on active duty from 1985 to 1995 in military intelligence. Ms. King is a decorated combat Veteran who served in Operation Desert Storm/Shield. Ms. King completed her master's degree in Organizational Leadership at Southern New Hampshire University and has taught as an Adjunct Professor at Cornell and has also been active in her community in driving diversity and inclusion initiatives at work, including the employment of people with disabilities to include Veterans.

Ms. King has experience as an outreach strategy manager for Facebook and is a consultant who partners with Abilities Expo. Abilities Expo hosts events in seven U.S. locations and one in Canada, with a focus on connecting people with disabilities, families and caregivers to resources in the community. Ms. King has also worked as a

diversity consultant at Lockheed Martin, N.W. Airlines, U.S. Bank and for Equality Maryland. Ms. King has been a champion for inclusion and diversity in business for people with disabilities.

Dr. Tiffany Drain

U.S. Air Force

Dr. Tiffany Drain served as a technical advisor to commanders and senior non-Commissioned officers, including elite special forces commanders on human resource management, training and career development, medical evaluation boards, military sexual assault prevention and response, staff assistance visits and inspector general inspections enlisting in 2000. Dr. Drain medically retired from the U.S. Air Force in 2011. Dr. Drain breadth of experience derives from positions held with Auburn University, Wounded Warrior Project, VA, North Carolina Veterans Treatment Courts and the Department of the Air Force. Dr. Drain has overseen human resource management, vocational guidance, vocational rehabilitation and employment and training programs that support military personnel, Veterans and families.

Ms. Drain is currently the Exceptional Family Member Program Coordinator for the Department of the Air Force at Pope Army Airfield, North Carolina. Ms. Drain is scheduled to complete her Master of Arts in Human Resource Management with a concentration in Organizational Leadership and Change Management from Colorado State University – Global Campus in Spring 2021. Ms. Drain has a Bachelor of Science in Workforce Education and Development from the College of Education and Human Services at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

Dr. Thiru M. Annaswamy

Dr. Thiru Annaswamy is a full-time staff physician and section chief in the Department of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation (PM&R) Service at the VA North Texas health care System/Dallas VA Medical Center and a professor with PM&R at the UT Southwestern Medical Center. Dr. Annaswamy received his medical degree at Mysore Medical College, Mysore, India; a master's degree in Motor Control and Neuroscience from the University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas; and post-graduate medical residency training in PM&R at Harvard Medical School/Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital in Boston, MA.

Dr. Annaswamy's clinical expertise is in evaluation and non-surgical management of spine & musculoskeletal disorders, chronic pain and diseases of the muscles & nerves. In addition to overlapping research interests in the same domains, Dr. Annaswamy has research interests and experience in applications of virtual reality and haptics in rehabilitation, tele-rehabilitation, medical simulation, gait and movement analysis, as well as in implementation science and clinical outcomes research. Dr. Annaswamy is board certified in PM&R, Pain Medicine, Electrodiagnostic Medicine and Neuromuscular Medicine. Dr. Annaswamy's leadership has provided written approval to support his membership on this federal advisory committee.

Dr. Franco Santos

U.S. Army Veteran

Dr. Franco Santos is currently serving as a civilian employee of the U.S. Army where he is the principal advisor to the commander of a medical recruiting battalion on matters relating to education and as the liaison between the U.S. Army recruiting battalion and colleges and universities in the states of Illinois, North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky. Prior to his current position with the U.S. Army, Dr. Santos was the Training Specialist for the Veterans Affairs Northwest Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center in Portland, Oregon. Dr. Santos also had been an Adjunct Professor of Psychology and Undergraduate Advisor at Mount Saint Mary's University in Los Angeles and had taught undergraduate psychology and sociology courses at DeVry University in Sherman Oaks, California. Dr. Santos received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from California State University, Northridge, his Master of Arts degree in Psychology with emphasis in Marriage and Family Therapy from Phillips Graduate Institute in Encino, California and his Doctor of Education with emphasis in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from California State University, Northridge. Dr. Santos' research interest is in Veteran transition, reintegration and rehabilitation.

Dr. Terri Pogoda

Dr. Terri Pogoda has worked at the VA Health Services Research & Development Center for health care Organization and Implementation Research, which is located at the VA Boston health care System for over 15 years. As an experimental psychologist by training and health services researcher in practice, Dr. Pogoda's research concentrates on post-deployment physical and psychological health and readjustment to civilian life among Post 9/11 Veterans diagnosed with traumatic brain injury and posttraumatic stress disorder. Special emphases include investigating VA provider and Veteran experiences with vocational rehabilitation programs (e.g., supported employment) that help Veterans to obtain meaningful and steady community-based employment, identifying and addressing gaps in service provision and promoting best practices. In addition to being employed by the VA, Dr. Pogoda also has a non-salaried academic appointment as a Research Associate Professor in the Department of Health Law, Policy & Management at the Boston University School of Public Health.

Dr. Christina Dillahunt-Aspillaga

Dr. Christina Jane Dillahunt-Aspillaga, PhD, CRC, CVE, ICVE, CLCP, CBIST, CRS career, since 2000 has included work as a rehabilitation counselor, rehabilitation scientist, researcher and rehabilitation educator. Rehabilitation Counseling is a multifaceted process where the counselor works collaboratively with clients and families to understand existing barriers, challenges and potentials in order to facilitate, personal, social, vocational and community adjustment following disability. For several years, Dr. Dillahunt has assumed various leadership, academic and service delivery roles in both

the disability and educational communities. Dr. Dillahunt has worked both independently and collaboratively at the local, state, national and international levels to research the community reintegration needs of Veterans, Service members and civilians with disabilities and their families. Dr. Dillahunt's research areas of specialization, research history and agenda reflect and incorporate these experiences.

Dr. Jennifer Martin

U.S. Marine Corps

Dr. Jennifer Martin is an audiologist at the Nurse Practitioner Group, in Central MA, where she serves as an Advanced Compensation and Pension Provider. Prior to becoming an audiologist, Dr. Martin served in the U.S. Marine Corps, from 2000-2008, where she deployed to the Middle East three times. In 2016, Dr. Martin graduated from Gallaudet University in Washington D.C. with a doctorate in audiology. During Dr. Martin's fourth year residency, she worked at the Boston VA health care System. Upon graduation, Dr. Martin worked as a staff audiologist at the Central Western, MA VA health care System in Worcester, MA. Dr. Martin is and has always been dedicated to giving back to our Nation's Veterans.

Dr. Michelle Peterson

Ms. Michelle Peterson has worked in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at the Minneapolis VA health care System for over 26 years. Ms. Peterson has a doctorate in physical therapy with a specialty in neurologic physical therapy. Ms. Peterson has practiced in acute, outpatient and inpatient settings; however, her primary focus for the last decade has been in inpatient rehabilitation for traumatic brain injury/Polytrauma in the Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center. From a clinical perspective, Ms. Peterson has worked with individuals with traumatic brain injury/polytrauma and directly involved in the evolution of rehabilitation care for this population within the VA at both a local and national level. From an education perspective, Ms. Peterson has assisted with the development of multiple clinical practice guidelines (stroke, mild traumatic brain injury, vestibular sequelae related to mild traumatic brain injury). These guidelines were developed through collaboration between the VA and DoD to assist clinicians in using evidence-based decisions to guide and optimize their treatment choices and practices. From a research perspective, Ms. Peterson has had the opportunity to be involved in research as a clinician in one of the treatment arms of a DoD/VA collaborative study that was comparing two types of treatment foci for traumatic brain injury.

Ms. Lorenza D. Hilliard

U.S. Army Veteran

Ms. Lorenza Hilliard began her career with the VA in 1997. Ms. Hilliard graduated with a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from San Diego State University in 2009 and began her career as a VRC. As a VRC, Ms. Hilliard provided rehabilitation services to Veterans in their efforts to transition to civilian life with the training necessary for suitable employment. Ms. Hilliard has worked with our homeless Veterans to provide

resources and connections in the community for stabilization with 12-step programs. Having completed just over 10 years in counseling and based on current observation of the need for the improvement for quality of services, Ms. Hilliard decided to pursue a doctorate degree to research and recommend improvement in services and/or training of service providers. Ms. Hilliard is a part of the fall 2020 cohort at the University of Iowa's Counseling, Education and Supervision program researching to improve services and/or training of service providers. Ms. Hilliard understands and supports individuals in their recovery and provides empathy and support to those in need.

Mr. Lawrence Rhone
U.S Army Veteran

Mr. Lawrence Rhone is an Office of General Counsel Accredited, Veterans Advocate, Claims Representative and a member of the National Organization of Veteran's Advocate. Mr. Rhone is a native of Fayetteville, North Carolina. Mr. Rhone currently resides on a farm in rural Flaxville, Montana. Since November 2018, Mr. Rhone has represented over 80 Veterans in facilitating access to benefits. Mr. Rhone has worked with his community medical facilities and professionals to enroll them with Tri-West to become VA in network providers of services. Mr. Rhone's nomination came from the office of U.S. Senator Jon Testers.

Ms. Jacqueline Breitenstein

Ms. Jackie Breitenstein has been a program manager of the SHARE Military initiatives at the Shepherd Center for seven years. Ms. Breitenstein developed and managed world-class comprehensive rehabilitation care for Post 9/11 Service members who have sustained mild to moderate brain injuries and co-occurring psychological diagnoses. SHARE provides Veterans with individual and group therapy sessions, as well as value-added services such as case management, chaplaincy, vocational counseling, peer support and transition support for Veterans to maximize a successful transition back home after graduation from our program. In addition to having no deaths by suicide since SHARE's inception in 2007, the program outcomes have demonstrated a substantial decrease in symptoms of brain injuries and an increase in personal and community successes by our program graduates. Ms. Breitenstein hopes to share lessons learned and best practices with the advisory committee.

Ex-Officio Members:

Nick Pamperin
VA, Veterans Benefits Administration

Mr. Pamperin is the Executive Director of VR&E Service. As Executive Director, Mr. Pamperin is responsible for overseeing the delivery of VR&E services to Veterans with service-connected disabilities and Service members who are in the process of transitioning from the military to prepare for, find and maintain suitable careers, or obtain independence in daily living. Mr. Pamperin leads operations employing

approximately 1,400 employees located at over 350 VBA locations including 56 regional offices, the National Capital Region Benefits Office, approximately 142 out-based offices, 71 Integrated Disability Evaluation Systems installations and 105 VetSuccess on Campus sites.

Mr. Jerry Elliot

U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration

Mr. Elliott is a senior policy analyst for Rehabilitation Services Administration at the U.S. Department of Education. Mr. Elliott supports the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services by providing technical assistance to state grant programs in the Training and Service Programs Division. Mr. Elliott also administers the basic vocational rehabilitation state grants and the supported employment state grants.

Dr. William “Bill” Metheny

U. S. Department of Labor

Dr. William Metheny is director of field operations in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Veterans’ Employment and Training Service. Dr. Metheny has consulted with businesses and government agencies for more than a decade, helping them to find ways to better utilize resources. Mr. Metheny’s clients have included large organizations such as Texas Instruments and the U.S. government, as well as the mid-size and extremely small firms prevalent in Montana and other western states.

Prior to entering consulting full-time, Dr. Metheny worked for over twelve years in the U.S. Army in administration and combat arms, followed by employment with several small firms in information systems and manufacturing. Mr. Metheny also taught operations management, human resource management and business strategy at the University of North Texas, Montana State University-Billings and for the University of Montana for about ten years.

Dr. Lisa Ottomanelli

U.S. Department of Veterans Health Administration

Dr. Lisa Ottomanelli is a Clinical Psychologist with the James A. Haley Veterans’ Hospital Research and Development since 2010. Dr. Ottomanelli has a Doctorate degree in Clinical Psychology from Texas Tech University in 1995. Dr. Ottomanelli is affiliated both with the Research Service of the James A. Haley VA Hospital & Clinics, Tampa, Florida, as a clinical psychologist and with the Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling Program, Department of Child and Family Studies, College of Behavioral and Community Sciences, University of South Florida, as a courtesy associate professor. Dr. Ottomanelli has over 20 years of experience conducting research in rehabilitation science focused on Veterans with spinal cord injuries or disorders which has given her unique insight into the critical contribution that employment makes to community reintegration and quality of life. Dr. Ottomanelli’ s work has focused on Veterans with physical and mental impairments, including Veterans with severe

impairments such as tetraplegia or post-traumatic stress disorder. Dr. Ottomanelli has distinguished herself in the areas described above, as evidenced by her selection for awards and speaker invitations.

Dr. Kristi Hill

U. S. Department of Health and Human Services

Dr. Kristi Hill is the Acting Director of the Administration for Community Living, National Institute on Disability, Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR). Dr. Hill provides oversight for NIDILRR's Offices of Research Sciences and Research Administration that together are responsible for sponsoring research, demonstration, training, technical assistance and related activities designed to maximize the full inclusion and integration of individuals with disabilities across the life span. Dr. Hill also serves as the Chair of the Interagency Committee on Disability Research, which is responsible for promoting coordination and cooperation among federal departments and agencies conducting disability and rehabilitation research. Dr. Hill is a U.S. Army Officer Veteran.

Part V. Charter

Department of Veterans Affairs Charter of the Veterans' Advisory Committee on Rehabilitation

- 1. Official Designation.** Veterans' Advisory Committee on Rehabilitation or VACOR.
- 2. Authority.** The Committee is established pursuant to 38 U.S.C. § 3121 and operates under the provisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act, as amended 5 U.S.C. App. 2.
- 3. Objectives and Scope of Activity.** The Committee's objective is to consult with and advise the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on the administration of Veterans' rehabilitation programs under title 38, United States Code.
- 4. Description of Duties.** The Committee shall submit to the Secretary an annual report on the rehabilitation programs and activities of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and shall submit such other reports and recommendations to the Secretary as the Committee determines appropriate. The annual report shall include an assessment of the rehabilitation needs of Veterans and a review of VA programs and activities designed to meet such needs.
- 5. Official to Whom the Committee Reports.** The Committee reports to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.
- 6. Office Responsible for Providing the Support to the Committee.** The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) is responsible for providing support to the Committee.
- 7. Estimated Annual Operating Costs in Dollars and Staff Years.** VA financial and personnel support for the Committee's work is estimated at \$175,000 per year and 1.20 full-time equivalent staff. All members will receive reimbursement of travel expenses in accordance with the Federal Travel Regulation for any travel made in connection with their duties as members of the Committee.
- 8. Designation Federal Officer.** The Designated Federal Officer (DFO), a full-time VA employee, will approve the schedule of Committee and subcommittee meetings. The DFO or a designee will be present at all Committee and subcommittee meetings, and each meeting will be conducted in accordance with an agenda prepared and approved by the DFO. The DFO is authorized to adjourn any meeting when he or she determines it is in the public interest to do so.
- 9. Estimated Number and Frequency of Meetings.** The Committee is expected to meet as often as two times annually.
- 10. Duration.** There is an ongoing and continuing need for the Committee to assist the Secretary by carrying out its responsibilities under 38 U.S.C. § 3121.

