

VETERANS SERVICE-MEMBERS & FAMILIES COORDINATION COUNCIL

MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, April 28, 2016

In Attendance:

David Brasuell, Co-Chairman, Idaho Division of Veterans Services
David Wood, Boise VAMC (VHA rep)
Kathy Malin, Director, Boise VARO (VBA rep)
Joshua Callihan, Boise VAMC USMC Representative
Ross Edmunds, Idaho Department of Health & Welfare
Richard Turner, Idaho National Guard
Chris Ramos, Veterans Program Coordinator, Idaho Department of Labor
Brent Ferro, US Department of Labor VETS
Dr. Bill Goesling, Idaho State Board of Education (via teleconference)
Dana Kelly, Idaho State Board of Education
Patty Weeks, Idaho Association of Counties
Karan Tucker, JANNUS
Teresa Sackman, ESGR Idaho Hero2Hired
Major Chris Borders, Idaho National Guard Public Affairs Officer
Bryan Madden, J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation Mission 43
Lucas O'Neill Gowen, Field Transition Assistance Advisor
Christina Iverson, Idaho Supreme Court Veterans Treatment Courts
Tony Torres, Hire Heroes USA Idaho Area
Daniel McQuesten, Air Force Reserve Representative
Terry Tippery, Director, Boise Vets Center
Dan Button, University of Idaho Veterans Assistance Office
Tracy Schaner, Deputy Administrator, Idaho Division of Veterans Services
Kevin Wallior, Idaho Division of Veterans Services, Minutes Taker

Next meeting: TBD

Meeting called to order at 9:30 AM

I. WELCOME – INTRODUCTIONS – ANNOUNCEMENTS

- One by one, all attendees identified themselves and their organizations.
- David Brasuell, Chairman, explained that this meeting meets both the Governor's intent under his executive order as well as meets the MyVA initiative to improve the Veterans Experience.

- The purpose of MyVA is for organizations serving veterans to coordinate and cooperate to improve the entirety of the Veterans experience.

II. BRIEFINGS

David Brasuell – IDVS

- David attending a meeting in Coeur d'Alene the first week of May regarding the Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs charged this committee to study and analyze challenges rural Veterans and their caregivers face when accessing health care, and advise him accordingly. More information about this can be found at <http://www.ruralhealth.va.gov/VRHAC/meeting-summaries.asp>.
- There is a lot of support in north Idaho for a 4th State Veterans Home located in Post Falls, Idaho
 - An additional lot was donated; it increases the size of the property from 6.1 acres to 7.3 acres.
 - Idaho is low on the VA priority list. Last year the VA only funded construction of 3 state veterans homes in the nation. There are a number of states higher on the list that have much larger veteran populations and need for facilities. 13 projects were funded last year. 10 were life and safety projects to bring homes within standard.
- There is progress regarding a 2nd State Veterans Cemetery
 - To be located in Eastern Idaho
 - 30 potential lots have been winnowed down to 3 sites.
 - There will be 3rd party assessments conducted on all three of the finalists (Idaho Falls site, Ammon site, and Blackfoot site)
- Women Veterans Conference will be held this fall at the Riverside Hotel in Boise
 - VA will be hosting a women veteran symposium November 12

Karan Tucker - JANNUS

- JANNUS is a forty-year-old non-profit providing health and human services. Operate the state suicide prevention hotline in partnership with Idaho Health & Welfare, IDVS, and many other community partners. The advisory board for the hotline has representation from the veteran community and the VA.
- Approximately 13% of callers into the Idaho Suicide Prevention Hotline are veterans/military and their families. This information is collected after the call is de-escalated. Demographic information is collected if the caller wishes to provide information. <https://www.idahosuicideprevention.org/>
- Legacy Corps follows the Ameri-Corp model but focuses on serving veteran and military families in a caregiver role. The volunteers provide 10-12 hours a week of respite or family caregiver support. Approximately 500 hours a month of respite care to veterans and families. <http://www.jannus.org/program/legacy-corps/>
- PATH, Project for Assistance for Transition from Homelessness have enrolled and housed 60 veterans through outreach. Most of the peer support counselors have similar backgrounds to those they are helping. One of the PATH peer support specialists is a veteran and has helped the program achieve success with other homeless veterans. <http://www.jannus.org/program/path-project-for-assistance-in-transition-from-homelessness/>

Richard Turner – Idaho National Guard/Gowen Field

- Air National Guard is deployed.
 - 300 airmen deployed as a part of Operation Inherent Resolve
 - It is a six-month deployment. Typically, ID ANG deployments are for 30 days or 45 days.
 - An additional 150 airmen are in the queue to deploy. These deployments would be six month tours, as well.
- Gowen is getting a Cyber Security Squadron within the next year.
- Army National Guard is looking like they will lose their Apaches
 - Before the end of this fiscal year

- Slated to get Blackhawks or Chinooks, no definitive manning numbers, yet.
- Army National Guard will be participating in European Reassurance Initiative.
- Federal Government approved growing the National Guard back to 350,000 strong
- Idaho Youth Challenge Academy (IDYCA) has a good partnership with the Lewiston Veterans Home
 - IDYCA is a volunteer program for 16 to 18-year-old teens that are at risk of dropping out or that have already dropped out of high school. The program is open to all students, without regard to race, sex, religious affiliation or household income. The goal of the program is to give youth a second chance to become responsible and productive citizens by helping them improve their life skills, education levels, and employment potential. The program incorporates a highly structured format, with an emphasis on student discipline and personal responsibility, to provide a positive, safe, and secure learning environment.
 - More information about the program can be found at [http://www.idyouthchallenge.com/about us/](http://www.idyouthchallenge.com/about_us/)
- Legislation presented to adjusting Idaho's version of USERRA
 - 2016 Legislative Session House Bill 473 <https://www.legislature.idaho.gov/legislation/2016/H0473.htm>
 - Amended existing law to revise definitions and provisions regarding *Idaho Code 46-409 The Militia Civil Relief Act*.
 - Extends USERRA rights to Idaho National Guard members who are called up for state call ups.
- Prospective Legislation
 - Capitalizing on Military Retirees to Enhance Idaho's Workforce and Economic Development via a tax exemption on Military Retirement Pay.

- Goal is to incentivize military retirees to choose Idaho as their residence and fill a projected shortfall of skilled technical workers.
 - National Guard leadership is interested in possible legislation providing tax relief for service members who are E-5 pay grade and lower.
 - Intent is to improve retention
 - Minimize hardship for junior enlisted and their families
- Consider approaching Governor Otter about a Proclamation changing PTSD to PTSI.
 - Rename Post Traumatic Stress Disorder to Post Traumatic Stress Illness.
 - Intent is to reduce the stigma associated with PTSD; emphasizes it has a medical illness as opposed to a disorder.
 - This would not change how it is used or referred by the medical community, but is meant to change the public narrative and reduce the negative stereotypes/connotations.

David Wood – VA Medical Center

- There is an Opioid Epidemic not just in the VA but nationally
 - VA has an initiative to address opioid epidemic.
 - Developed a composite score to determine how well VA Facilities are managing their patient's needs.
 - 4 component composite score
 - percent of veterans prescribed an opiate;
 - percent of opioids prescribed to patients who are also using psychiatric medicines;
 - urine drug screen compliance, to determine veterans are taking the right dose. If a veteran is taking the incorrect dosage, whether too much or too little, it can be problematic.

- and percent of patient on greater than 100 morphine equivalent dose. This is a very dangerous level of opioid use that can result in death for the veteran.
 - Boise VAMC was worst in the nation regarding the opioid epidemic composite score last year. In overall performance, Boise VAMC is a 5-star facility and ranked 3rd nationally.
 - Boise VAMC is no longer worst, after implementing a program to address this issue. Has improved to 6th from the bottom. Spokane VAMC is 18th from the bottom. Walla Walla VAMC and SLC VAMC were not in the bottom 20 worst offenders list.
 - Part of the problem is that years ago doctors were trained to treat pain aggressively, particularly from medical schools in the northwest such as the University of Washington. Doctors are having to relearn a better, less drug dependent method to treat pain.
 - This is an important issue because it can effect veterans long term health, quality of life, and ability to maintain employment.
- Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs)
 - Before mid-90s there were very few CBOCs in the VA. Dr. Kaiser created standards to increase access to care for veterans. This lead to increase in CBOCs across the country.
 - Boise VAMC has five associated CBOCs in its catchment area: Burns, OR, Caldwell, Mountain Home, Salmon, and Twin Falls.
 - Salt Lake City VAMC has CBOCs located in Idaho Falls and Pocatello.
 - Spokane VAMC has CBOCs located in Coeur d'Alene and Sandpoint.
 - Walla Walla VAMC ha CBOCs located in Grangeville and Lewiston.
 - Boise VAMC has had a desire to add a 6th CBOC in the McCall/Cascade area because there is a hole in the coverage across the Boise VAMC catchment in the McCall/Cascade area.

- Boise VAMC's thinking has started to wonder if that is the best strategy, due to the Choice Card Program. If a veteran is within 45 miles of a VA access point they have to use that facility and lose flexibility. Boise VAMC has conducted community town halls in Cascade and McCall to gauge whether those communities would like a CBOC in their area. Those Communities do not want a CBOC because Veterans currently use Choice Program and feel they make their community clinics more viable. Veterans in the community did indicate they would like a facility if the Choice Program goes away.
 - Expansion plans for Twin Falls and Caldwell CBOCs on hold for now because of the Choice Program.
 - Senator McCain would like to expand the Veterans Choice program to all veterans and based on the service provided. Currently veterans cannot use Choice even if their VA facility does not offer the specialty care they need on-site.
- Cardiac Catheterization
 - Currently a hole in Boise VAMC care is cardiac catheterization. Boise VAMC has a couple of cardiologists on staff that are able to provide consultation and medical treatment, but Boise VAMC is unable to provide cardiac catheterization.
 - Currently, if a veteran needs a cardiac catheterization and it is emergent the VA sends them to St. Alphonsus or St. Luke's. If it is non-emergent they send them to Portland VAMC or Seattle VAMC. Veterans are often displeased that they have to be sent to Portland or Seattle for a cardiac catheterization, but Boise VAMC has to do so due to cost considerations. Those procedures cost approximately \$25,000 per procedure when the veteran is sent to St. Alphonsus or St. Luke's.
 - In the last three or four years, Boise VAMC has decided they need to add that ability to their facility. They've identified space, design is underway, and they have had numerous meetings with the VA higher ups to determine that they have the volume of need and everything in place clinically to support a cardiac catheterization lab.
 - There have been questions on whether VA Choice should be used for this care. But Boise VAMC has determined that VA Choice is not particularly effective at providing emergent care to veterans. It works

well for non-emergent care, but belief is that for emergent cardiac needs it would be in the best interest of veterans to have a cardiac catheterization capability.

- In the next couple of years, Boise VAMC will have a cardiac catheterization capability unless it gets vetoed higher up the chain.
- Boise VAMC has the only internal medicine residency program in the state of Idaho. This lab would further the ability to provide essential cardiac training to Medical Residents.
- Boise VAMC will be hosting their annual all Veteran Welcome Home Event on June 25th.

Kathy Malin – VARO

- Over the last couple of years, VARO goal for claims processing was an average of 125 days with 98% accuracy.
 - Boise VARO and VBA have met that goal with an average of 89 days for a completed claim.
- It is the "Year of the Appeal" for the Veterans Benefits Administration
 - The appeals rate has remained static at approximately 10-12% of all claims filed.
 - The Appeals system is broken and needs a legislative change regarding how appeals can be processed.
 - Currently 450,000 appeals in the system. If no change is made to the system of Appeals, by 2025 there is projected to be 2 million appeals in the queue.
 - Currently, 66,000 veterans waiting to have their appeal heard before a travel board or video hearing before a judge. They can only accommodate 16,000 hearing per year.
 - NASDVA has been working with the VA to brainstorm solutions to the VBA Appeals process.
- National Work Queue

- Traditionally, all claims were worked by the state of jurisdiction. Last 5-10 years manually moved claims through FedEx to other VAROs to spread the work load and ensure claims were worked.
- Since implementing the paperless system, move the claims around electronically from VAROs that don't have the necessary experience or staffing to work a case to VAROs elsewhere that do. The work load is still manually moved around.
- Boise VARO is able to handle Idaho claims and claims filed in other VAROs, too. Boise VARO typically works more cases than what Idaho is able to file.
- Process of shifting to an automatic work queue as of May 1, 2016. This will mean that no matter where a person files a claim the next available VSR no matter where they are located will work the next available claim.

Bryan Madden – JA & Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation Mission 43

- Mission 43 is a branch of the JA & Kathryn Albertson Family Foundation.
- It is primarily focused on assisting Post-9/11 era veterans, although it is not exclusive to that group of veterans.
- There are four components: Purpose, Social Connection, Education, & Employment
 - Each of those four components has a specific grantee.
 - 3-5 year grants
 - Goal is to help grantees become self-sufficient organizations within the state of Idaho over the 3-5 years.
 - There is a serious expectation of performance with each grantee and ability to meet specific metrics.
 - Purpose: Team Rubicon provide veterans and first responders the opportunity to continue to serve through deployment/missions to disaster areas.
 - Allows veterans to use their military skills to continue serving their community and country.

- Assisted after Houston Flooding and Ecuador Earthquakes
- Social Connection: Team Red, White, & Blue
 - Provides veterans an opportunity to stay active and fit and build camaraderie with individuals who have a shared experience and values.
- Education: No specific grantee, as of yet.
 - Longer term strategy.
 - The core of the Albertsons Family Foundation is Education.
 - Funded a study which developed cohorts for a clear roadmap to success.
 - College of Idaho is doing a fantastic job assisting veterans with retention, graduation rates, and GPA maintenance. Veterans are surpassing traditional students at these metrics.
- Employment: Hire Heroes USA (Tony Torres provided this portion of the brief)
 - Tony Torres is the manager for the Idaho Area of Hire Heroes USA
 - Empowers veterans and spouses with employment success. Assist with resume building, connect with employers, help improve interview skills, provide workshops, etc.
 - Nationally contributed to 3600 hires last year, and has a goal of 6500 hires this year. Well on the way to meeting that goal, averaging 120 hires per week nationally.
 - In Idaho, goal is 250 registrations and 50 hires. Have already met the registration goal and fully expect to surpass the hiring goal.

Ross Edmunds – Idaho Health & Welfare

- Idaho has two Crisis Centers operating one in Idaho Falls and the other in Coeur d'Alene. These facilities allow individuals to obtain 24 hours to de-stress, calm down and be connected to resources during a crisis (defined as a behavioral health crisis: refers to either mental health disorders, substance

abuse disorders or both co-occurring together). If they aren't ready to leave after 24 hours they can walk out to the parking lot and turn around and come back for another 24 hours course of care.

- The Idaho Legislature approved funding for two additional Crisis Centers to be located in Boise and, likely, Twin Falls.
- Legislature appropriated nearly a million dollars to develop an office of suicide prevention. With that funding, \$200,000 of ongoing permanent funds have been allocated to the Idaho Suicide Prevention Hotline. This equates to 60% of the annual operating budget that will be provided by the state.
 - Office of Suicide Prevention will be located in the Idaho Health & Welfare's Division of Public Health.
 - The office will have 4 staff members.

MyVA Communities Rural Veteran Public Forum in North Idaho – David Brasuell

- The purpose of this forum is to gain feedback from primarily rural residing veterans from outside the Treasure Valley. Excellent opportunity for north and north central Idaho veterans to be heard.
- Dan Button working with the University of Idaho campus in Moscow, ID in providing an adequate venue for this forum.
- There will be representation from the Spokane and Walla Walla Vet Centers, Spokane and Walla Walla VAMC, CBOC representatives from up north, county service officers, and representatives from the organizations on the VSMF.
- Target date is June 14th (edit: since the VSMF meeting the date has changed to June 13th)

Christina Iverson – Idaho Supreme Court Veterans Treatment Courts

- Identifying veterans incarcerated is difficult. Rely on self-identification from veterans. Idaho Corrections has hired a veteran coordinator to help identify veterans incarcerated.
- Approximately, 8% of overall incarcerated population are veterans. Around 1200 veterans are under felony supervision either probation or parole.
- Idaho has 6 Veterans Treatment Courts. Idaho Falls and Twin Falls are the two newest Veterans Treatment Courts.

- Coeur d'Alene is considering implementing a treatment court in their district, as well.
- There are 84 veterans across the state currently participating in the Veterans Treatment Court program.
- Idaho is the 1st state to implement statewide standards and guidelines on how Veterans Treatment courts operate. Includes:
 - Eligibility criteria;
 - Case Management;
 - Coordination services; and
 - Evaluation
 - <http://www.isc.idaho.gov/solve-court/home>
 - [http://www.isc.idaho.gov/psc/VTC Standards Guidelines 4.2.15.pdf](http://www.isc.idaho.gov/psc/VTC_Standards_Guidelines_4.2.15.pdf)
- Research on best practices is limited regarding Veterans Treatment Courts across the country. Idaho Supreme Court is looking to further and develop best practices to improve Veterans Treatment Court program in Idaho.
- Veterans Treatment Courts make a real difference in the lives of veterans.
- It takes approximately one and a half years for veterans to complete the program.

Patty Weeks – Idaho Association of Counties

- 41 of 44 Counties have a County Veterans Service Officer.
 - Canyon, Clark, and Nez Perce Counties do not currently have Veterans Service Officers.
- Idaho Association of Counties is going to host a Conference on Mental Illness drawing diverse organizations together to brainstorm how to better provide mental health care to Idaho citizens with an emphasis on keeping people out of jail.
- Many rural barriers to access mental health treatment.

Major Chris Borders – Gowen Field

- Outreach team are working on providing furniture for homeless veterans. Working with estate-sale companies to collect furniture in this effort.

Teresa Sackman – Employer Support of Guard and Reserve

- ESGR is the only DoD volunteer organization. It is a nationwide organization. Volunteers of this organization are considered DoD employees of non-pay status. <http://www.esgr.mil/>
- ESGR has growing committees in Eastern Idaho, Magic Valley, and Lewiston.
- Recently held a Boss lift in Pocatello/Idaho Falls area with 30 employers.
- Boise will host a Boss lift in June. Will have 100-130 employers at the Boise event.
- ESGR has a national partnership with the US Department of Labor. Idaho already had a partnership with US Department of Labor VETS. Idaho's relationship will not change as a result of the national partnership. They will just sign an update memorandum of understanding.

Chris Ramos – ID Department of Labor

- Unemployment for the state and veterans is around 4%.

Brent Weeks – US Department of Labor

- Working with Nez Perce tribe to assist with their homeless veteran population.

Financial Literacy Resources

- Rural Dynamics, Inc. operates in Montana and has started to expand into Idaho. <http://ruraldynamics.org/>
- Veterans Plus is a non-profit that assists veterans with financial management resources <http://www.veteransplus.org/>
- Veterans Financial Coalition is a coalition of diverse non-profit organizations that assist veterans with financial counseling and planning. <http://www.veteransfinancialcoalition.org/>