



STATE OF WASHINGTON

## VETERANS AFFAIRS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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### COMMANDERS CALL

December 6, 2023 – 9:30 am – 12:30 pm

Thurston County Readiness Center

8303 Kimmie St. SW

Olympia, WA

### Meeting Minutes

The 2024 VAAC Commander's Call was held on December 6<sup>th</sup> at the Washington Army National Guard's Thurston County Readiness Center in Tumwater. The meeting was extremely well attended including Commanders and representatives from more than 17 different Veteran Service Organizations along with the VAAC "Members At Large" and a majority of the WDVA's Leadership Team. This was the first Commander's Call for a number of the attendees.

- David's (David Puente, Director, WDVA) opening remarks highlighted WDVA's special partnership with our federal VA partners, VSOs, counties and local veteran support organizations across the state. **He asked the attendees to "Recommit to Serving Those Who Served"**. David also highlighted a number of WDVA accomplishments for the calendar year 2023.
- Ron Black (VAAC Chair) Welcomed everyone and proceeded with a "roll-call" to recognize the VAAC members and VSO attendees present. (Note: Marine Corps League, Military Officers Association of America, VFW, WVAC, DAV, Fleet Reserve Association, Paralyzed Vets of America, AMVETS, American Legion, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Vet Hope.org, American Military Family, NABVETS, WANG, American Vets for Equal Rights, American Vietnam Veterans War Memorial, Nine9Line) He also noted the need for service in our VSOs and that we could always join, "one more VSO"!
- Solomon (Solomon Gilbert, Deputy Director, WDVA) noted that 2024 is year two of the current biennium and shared that there are eight WDVA requests for supplemental funding. He invited members to monitor the WDVA's [Legislative Webpage](#)

**Q:** What are the impacts if none of the supplemental funding requests are approved?

**A:** The WDVA will work within it's current budget and reprioritize funding as required.

- Mary's (Mary Forbes, Assistant Director, WDVA) remarks highlighted the importance of, **"What we can do together"** and the Agency's ability to bring groups together (who have common interests). Mary introduced the WDVA's strategic objective to reduce veteran suicide by

highlighting the Agency's focus on programs that increase Health, Growth, Well-being, Connectivity, and Purpose for veterans.



- Connie Chapman (Director, Suicide Prevention Program) covered her team's breakdown and geographic orientation, data points on suicides and firearms use, the Governor's Challenge program here in WA State, details on the WA state 988 license plate emblem program whose funds go to community organizations that provide evidence-based Suicide Prevention programs to Veterans (see QR code). Connie also mentioned the planned Comcast TV commercial to highlight this program in the Western WA Comcast footprint.
- Keith Meyer (Director, Counseling and Wellness Programs) focused on how WDVA is reducing barriers to veterans needing services. WDVA has many programs that serve all veterans regardless of characterization of service/discharge. He emphasized the importance of peer support in a post military life and collective impact of the peer service programs in "Enhancing Protective Factors" for veterans and their family members. He gave a brief overview of the WDVA's Staff Sergeant Fox Suicide Prevention Grant program and some of the peer support programs available. Keith included four calls to action:
  - [988 Prevent Veteran Suicide License Plate Emblem](#) and [Grant Donations](#), apply as a veteran [Community Resource](#), [LEARN Training](#), and **the importance of Building Community Partnerships**
- Mary and Steve Gill (Veteran Services Administrator) then talked to the WDVA's efforts to increase the Percentage of WA State Veterans Connected to their Earned Disability Compensation Benefits.
- Dan Murray (State Homes Operations Director) gave an overview of the WDVA's efforts for all of the State Veterans Homes achieve and sustain a Medicare 5-Star quality measure rating. He also gave a short overview of each of the state's nursing homes for veterans and the entry criteria.
- Shellie Willis (Chair WVAC) highlighted the importance of the committee's work in advocating for Women Veterans(ship) and build awareness of the committee's roles within the larger VAAC. She also noted the efforts to convene a separate town hall for Women Veterans directly preceding the larger VAAC Town Hall events and the importance of allowing women veterans a safe space to discuss related issues. She asked attendees to mark their calendars for the 2024 Women Veterans Conference scheduled for June 8th and reminded everyone that June 12<sup>th</sup> each year is Women Veterans Day. She closed by "**Challenging (everyone) to Commit**" in 2024 adding that "absence takes away from credibility".
- Dr. Larry Pruitt (VA PSHCS Director, Suicide Prevention) Highlighted the **importance of collaboration** (emphasis added in the area of suicide prevention) and the VA's efforts to work farther 'upstream' of veteran health care issues. The VA PSHCS is "1A" rated (largest & most complex) and the 4<sup>th</sup> largest VA healthcare agency in the US. In the area of suicide prevention the VA PSHCS is unique in that it has 15 suicide prevention coordinators (2-3 times more than like rated agencies) and 2 Community Engagement and Partnership Coordinators.

**Q:** Are COMPACT Act services available to veterans regardless of the VA rating?

**A:** Yes, you must have an Honorable or Other Than Honorable characterization of service, who served more than 100 days under a combat exclusion or in support of a contingency operation, or 24 or more months on active duty, or who were the victim of a physical assault of a sexual nature, a battery of a sexual nature, or sexual harassment while serving.

- Chantille Stoval (Assistant Director, VA Seattle Regional Office) highlighted their office's **willingness to collaborate** and the following efforts/programs: "Customer Experience" plan of action which includes increasing outreach efforts on JBLM, improving the BDD (Benefits Delivery at Discharge) claim % for transitioning servicemembers, and assisting the unprogrammed loss (UPL) population of servicemembers transitioning from JBLM. She also highlighted a number of initiatives for 2024 to include the use of AI tools to increase claims process efficiency and reduce claim processing times, and hiring/adding more employees to address the claims backlog created in large part by the PACT Act provisions.
- Marquise S (Tahoma National Cemetery) – highlighted the benefits of burials at any national cemetery and some of the unique aspects of the Tahoma National Cemetery. He also noted the many burials options available and considerations (suggestions) for end-of-life preparations.

**Q:** (for Dr. Pruitt, VA PSHCS) Where do veterans of Clark County get their services?

**A:** WDVA serves all veterans in the state of Washington but Clark County veterans fall within the Portland VA catchment area (although the VA PSHCS will gladly assist the veteran in making coordination).

**Q:** (for Dr. Pruitt, VA PSHCS) How does the Self Scheduling 4 Community Care work?

**A:** Veterans can schedule with providers directly.

- David Puente CLOSED with 3 Calls to Action:
  1. [Armed Forces License Plate](#) sales help fund maintenance and operations for the State Veterans Cemetery (988 Emblem sales help fund community suicide prevention programs)
  2. Connect with someone you don't know and grow your network
  3. Consider/Encourage "Volunteerism"