



STATE OF WASHINGTON

VETERANS AFFAIRS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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VAAC TOWN HALL AND WOMEN VETERANS FORUM

October 18, 2023

8:30 am – 9:30 am Women Veterans Forum

Veterans Foreign Wars

10:00 am – 12:30 pm VAAC Town Hall

Veterans of Foreign Wars Post #1435

212 S David Road

Spokane Valley, WA 99212

MINUTES

Welcome, Introduction of
VAAC Members
Invocation, Pledge of
Allegiance

Bob Mead called the Town Hall to order and Bob Wallace led the
pledge of Allegiance and gave the invocation.

Introduction of Guests

Shellie Willis introduced special guests:

- Representative Leonard Christian
- Nicole Rees, Eastern Washington Representative to Patty Murray
- Douglas Huff, Military & Veterans Liaison to Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers

WDVA Updates

Solomon Gilbert, Jr, Deputy Director WDVA

- Thanked special guests and representatives from Man-Grandstaff Medical Center for their participation.
- Thanked Spokane Regional Veteran Service Center and Cat Nichols for their participation.
- Thanked VFW Post 1435 for the use of their facility.
- Explained that we are holding town halls in different communities as we want to hear from you on what is working and what we can do better.
- WDVA has updated our Strategic plan to set our priorities for the next few years which have an impact on the goals that we are trying to achieve throughout the state.
 - Save and transform lives
 - Respect, empower and inspire everyone

- Be the leading state in veteran service delivery and outcomes
- Operate effectively and efficiently

Representative Leonard Christian

- Introduced himself as an Air Force retiree.
- Spokane Valley is in his district.
- Wants to make a difference for veterans.
- Appointed to the Joint Committee for Veterans and Military Affairs.
- Indicated that his office is always open to listen to veterans to get issues resolved.

Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center

Sam McComas, Associate Director, Patient Care Services-Nurse Executive

- Sam McComas, Associate Director, Patient Care Services-Nurse Executive
- Happy to participate in a face to face interaction with Veterans.
- Last weekend hosted the 14th Annual American Indian Veterans Advisory Committee Honoring Ceremonies.
- Attended the 4th annual Spokane Standdown at the Salvation Army Headquarters.
- They are poised to go to where veterans live via their Mobile Medical Unit (MMU).
- At the Medical Center focused on getting veterans their flu/COVID vaccines.
- Medical Center will undergo some major changes.
 - 2024 – will see groundbreaking as they expand their Behavioral/Mental Health and primary care services.
 - Will be expanding Community Living Center on campus.
 - Will expand with a brand-new community based out-patient center in Spokane Valley. Additional information will be coming soon.
- Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center earned VA's most improved healthcare experience record for inpatient veterans in 2022.

Regional Veteran Service Center

Cat Nichols & Christopher Dorcheus

- Cat gave a brief bio and “the why” she loves what she does for veterans.
- She is the Sr. Director over Veteran Services, as well as being responsible for four (4) other counties.
- Historic MOU signing with WDVA & NCHV pledging their partnership for homeless veterans.
- Community partners – if need space their conference is available.
- Spokane County is a National Association of Counties 2022 & 2023 Achievement Award winner.
 - 2022 – Vet Homelessness

- 2023 – Skill Bridge. Getting Veterans employed in Spokane Valley.
- Nationally recognized best practices in Veterans Services
- County Leadership Award 2023
- Operation GreenLight initiative through NACo is encouraging county governments across the nation to light up their buildings green during Veterans Day week to honor or veterans.
- Chris shared Eastern Washington Service Center data

| Eastern Washington Service Center | | | | | | Contact: Christopher Borcheus Phone: 509-477-3690 Data Source: EVCMS/Spokane County SCRVS/C |
|---|--|--|-------------------------|--|------|---|
| OBJECTIVE: Expand and Improve Eastern WA Regional Veterans Services | | | | | | |
| Measure | Target | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 YTD | 2023 | New Direction for 2024 |
| Number of New Clients | Increase number of veterans served in Eastern WA | Veterans Served 5867 | Veterans Served 6625 | Veterans Served 7042 | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 Full Time VSO positions, 2 Admin Staff and 2 DoD SkillBridge, 1 Vet Corps, 6 VA Work Studies Developing electronic triage and claims intake system Formalized Statewide CVSO case conferencing \$1.2 Million County Funded Budget Expansion of Services & Education |
| Expansion of Services | Increase # of veterans receiving VA Benefits | | | | | |
| High Employee Engagement & Positive Culture | Establish increased respect equity in EW | | | | | |
| Action | | Who | | Status | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued outreach and networking with current partners; Goodwill, VAMC, HCHV, WorkSource and other Community Partners Subcontracted Behavioral Health Educate and Inform potential partners on County Veterans services, HVRP, DVA programs, & seek future funding opportunities. Continue to cultivate positive workplace culture & human centered services. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program Mgr SCRVS Staff | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> WorkSource – In office Weekly FAFB Outreach/FAFB TAP Weekly Re-Open & Workforce Strategic Planning Meetings Virtual/In-person Quarterly CVEB Virtual/In-person Quarterly VAB Meetings Virtual/In-person Monthly Veterans Task Force Meetings Virtual/In-person COC Board/BOS COC Board Campus Outreach (Vet Corps) Local/State/National Events | | |

- Claims Benefits classes offered 2x month. Everyone that fills out the form is asked to attend the class.
- They have connection points to VRNE – Veteran Readiness & Employment.
- Strong relationship with Fairchild.
- How do veterans find them?
 - Word of mouth
 - Visibility at Fairchild
 - Quality of the work they have done.

WDVA Program Overview and PACT Act

Paul Cruz, Financial Transition & Reintegration Services Program Manager

- Overview of Major WDVA programs
- State Veterans Homes
 - Spokane Veterans Home - Spokane
 - WA Soldiers Home – Orting
 - WA Veterans Home – Port Orchard
 - Walla Walla Veterans Home
- Transitional Housing Program (THP)
 - Port Orchard – 48 beds
 - Orting – 82 beds
 - Goal is to increase residential stability.
 - Increase their skill level.
 - Assist them in permanent housing.
 - Assist in obtaining employment.
- State Veterans Cemetery
 - Located in Medical Lake

- Eligibility requirements mirror US Dept. of Veterans Affairs cemeteries.
- New application on WDVA website: [Cemetery | WDVA \(wa.gov\)](http://Cemetery.WDVA.wa.gov)
- Veterans Services
 - Contracts with 6 Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs)
 - Currently 23 county Veteran Service Officer (VSO) agreements with 26 out of 39 counties being served.
 - Have MOAs with 7 out of 29 federally recognized Indian tribes.
- Veterans Service Programs
 - Veterans Estate Management Program (VEMP) – offers protective payee services for veterans and family members who are incapable of managing their own finances.
 - LGBTQ+ Veterans Outreach Coordinator – Robin Lang connects LGBTQ+ veterans to their benefits.
- Counseling & Wellness Programs
 - WDVA Counseling Program – contracted licensed mental health providers serve veterans and families experiencing PTSD and Military Sexual Trauma.
 - Brain Injury & Recovery Program – supports and represents every veteran in WA.
 - Suicide prevention and Support Program – Governor’s challenge to prevent suicide among service members and families.
- Transition, Readiness & Family Services
 - WA State Military Transition and Readiness Council (WSMTRC) - Partnership that supports service members and families to successfully transition into civilian careers.
 - Military Spouse Initiative – policy and program advocacy for military spouses.
 - Veteran Owned Business (VOB) Program – recruits and enrolls veteran and service members in VOB certification.

11:00 AM
Brain Injury and Recovery-TBI
Program Brief

Heather Bahme, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Program Manager

- When something bad happens, you have (3) choices!
 - Let it define you.
 - Let it defeat you.
 - Let it strengthen you.
- Introduced team
 - Heather Bahme, PCBIS, Brain Injury & Recovery TBI Program Manager.
 - Brianna Flott, Brain Injury & Recovery TBI Program Specialist.
 - Located on the Eastern Western University campus.
- Who they serve.
 - All Veterans

- Family members of Veterans with TBI/ABI
- Mental health of medical providers
- Institutions of higher learning
- Employers of Veterans
- Veterans who are homeless
- Veterans involved in the justice system.
- What they provide!
 - One-on-one assistance and advocacy for Veterans with TBI/ABI
 - Support and education
 - Screening tools and training
 - Employer support services
 - Treatment programs
 - Staff training
 - Support group presentations
 - Case referrals
- What is a Brain Injury?
 - Can happen to anyone, anywhere, at any time.
 - Result of damage to the brain, which can be caused by traumatic or non-traumatic events.
 - TBI = traumatic brain injury
 - ABI = acquired brain injury
 - Injury from a blast is the “signature injury” of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.
 - Leading causes:
 - Falls
 - Stroke
 - Motor vehicle accidents
 - Physical assaults
 - Sports related injuries

Mann-Grandstaff VAMC
Women Veterans Programs
Overview

Dr. Megan Chandler, Lead Physician and Julie Liss, MSN, RN –
Women Veterans Programs

- VA Women’s Health
- Shared her “why” of becoming a doctor at the VA Medical Center. Served in the Peace Corps.
- All visits are 30 minutes compared to 10-15 in other settings.
- Women wellness visits are 60 minutes.
- Celebrating 100 years of providing care to women veterans
 - Expansion of pregnancy care
 - Breast cancer awareness – 1 in 8 women will have breast cancer.
 - VA Provides screening, diagnostic evaluation, biopsies, specialty referrals.
 - Toxic exposure breast cancer incidence rate is currently unknown.
 - VA remains concerned and research is ongoing.

- Benefits to woman exposed to burn pits has increased (risk assessment) by age of 40.
- Childcare services available for appointments.

WDVA Suicide Prevention & Awareness

Alyssa Warburton, Program Peer Specialist

- Suicide Prevention can be difficult to talk about.
- Suicide prevention is important because in 2020 approximately 46,000 Americans died by suicide.
- It's the 12th leading cause of death. Minority communities are at the highest risk for suicide.
- In the veteran community there were approximately 6,000 deaths in 2020 from suicide. Veterans are 57.3% or 1.5 times more likely to die by suicide than non-veteran adults.
- The Suicide Prevention Program is in response to the Governor's challenge where we address suicide by ask the question initiatives. Connecting with service providers and veteran service organizations to be able to ask and identify veterans and their families.
- Talk about proper firearm and medication storage. Important to suicide prevention as research has shown that the more time space and distance you can create between lethal means from someone experiencing suicide, the less likely they are to find a second means.
- Outreach within the community to connect veterans with their resources.
- Introduced program manager Connie Chapman.
- Reach out contact Alyssa at Alyssa.warburton@dva.wa.gov if you have any additional questions.
- [Suicide Prevention and Support | WDVA \(wa.gov\)](#)

Women Veterans Advisory Committee (WVAC) Overview and Update

Shellie Willis, WVAC Chair

- Town Hall has changed women attendance by adding the WVAC to the VAAC Town Hall agenda.
- Has created a forum in area for women to ask questions.
- Has created a space for women veterans.
- Mission is about being advocates in our community for Washington State Veterans
- 4 things the WVAC does:
 - Connect women to their identities as veterans.
 - Change the perception of what veterans look like.
 - Connect women veterans to benefits.
 - Connect women veterans to the community.
- Doing a call out to all women veterans
- Handed out information on how to connect to Women Veterans.
- Asked for veterans to reach out and connect with women veterans.
- Women's Veterans Conference June 8, 2024.
- Add Taitin Waivers – Paul Chapter 35

Closing and Meeting
Adjourned

Solomon thanked VFW Post 1435 and presented Darren Hughes with a WDVA Challenge Coin and Veteran pin.

Adjourned - 12:15PM