



STATE OF WASHINGTON
VETERANS AFFAIRS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
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Meeting Minutes

Meeting attended by (VAAC Member)	Rufus Hoefer, Joe Jimenez, and Jim Sims
Date	June 27, 2019
Time	10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Location	American Legion Post 47, 103 E 6 th Ave, Colville, WA
Call to Order	Meeting called to order by Rufus Hoefer Invocation by Cheri Knox Pledge of Allegiance led by Robert Dorstad
Welcome & Introductions:	Welcome and Introduction – Rufus Hoefer <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poem reading of The Charge of the Light Brigade – Hannah Nichols• Informed the guests of the role of the VAAC and introduced VAAC members.
Presentations	Community Leader Update – Jack Smith, Colville Councilmember <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welcomed attendees Legislative Greeting – Representative Jacqueline Maycumber WDVA Update – Heidi Audette <ul style="list-style-type: none">• DVA Priorities: Our number one priority is connecting veterans and their families to their earned benefits. In many cases, our biggest challenge is our ability to reach out to rural veterans, which is one of the main reasons that these town halls take place in cities, and towns where government does not have a big presence. Connecting veterans and families to VA disability compensation or VA pension benefits helps generate sustainable income for veterans. Therefore, we're very excited about the legislation Representative Maycumber introduced and got passed this session, HB 1448 that will create a County Veteran Service Officer program in our state. The Legislature provided 2 years of funding with the opportunity to fund a County VSO for at least two counties with populations of less than 100,000. We have drafted a request for proposals that will be sent out

in a few weeks so that Counties can determine whether they are interested in applying for this grant funding.

- **Emotional Wellness and Suicide Prevention and Awareness:** During the last legislative session, the legislature budgeted \$282,000 in one-time funding to develop a statewide plan to reduce suicide among service members, veterans, and their families. Our Counseling and Wellness team is working now with partners such as Forefront to incorporate a plan and training opportunities into service providers and veterans advocates across the state. **It's important that we make this training available to you and other community providers like you. You might be the person who sees that something isn't right and asks the right questions at the right time.**
- **Serving Those Who Served Conference:** This is our 4th year holding a completely free conference in Eastern WA. This year, it will be held the Tri Cities July 17-18. If you haven't registered, there is still time and we would love to see you there!
- **Focus on Eastern Washington:** We have State Veteran Homes in Walla Walla and Spokane. We have a State Veterans Cemetery located in Medical Lake and we are planning for a second cemetery near the Tri-cities or Yakima area. We also have our new Veterans Service Center in Spokane, which Cat Nichols is here to tell you much more about. This year, the legislature provided funding to hire a TBI coordinator to serve eastern WA, so Dan Overton our current TBI coordinator is working on getting someone into that position as well.
- **Armed Forces License Plates:** The vast majority of the funding is used to operate the State Veterans Cemetery in Medical Lake. Some funds are also used to provide services to homeless veterans who might not qualify for other VA programs. So if you don't have your plate yet, we hope you'll consider purchasing one. **They are available to veterans, active duty and family members.** There is also an option to put Veterans Emblems on any license plate. Veterans can select from emblems such as the Bronze Star, Distinguished Service Cross, US Veteran as well as two campaign ribbons such as the Vietnam Service Ribbon, National Defense Medal or Afghanistan Campaign Medal. The emblem packets are \$15 and provide funding for Memorials around the state. The VAAC is currently accepting grant applications to provide funds for new memorials or upkeep on existing memorials. Typically, grants range from a few hundred dollars to \$2,000 or so depending on the number of requests the VAAC receives.

Two other plates that I would like to mention along with some legislation that changed fees for them are the Purple Heart License Plates, and the Gold Star License Plates. Veterans eligible for the Purple Heart plates will now receive one plate at no cost, the plate is free and the registration for that vehicle is free. The same is true for Gold Star Plates for widows and parents. Other Gold Star family

members will continue to pay an \$8.75 plate fee and their regular annual registration fees.

- **SB 5160:** The last piece of legislation I want to highlight is SB 5160 which modifies property tax exemption and deferral programs in WA State. The bill changed the income thresholds for the senior citizen, individuals with disabilities, and veterans property tax exemptions. The disability rating for veterans to qualify moved from 100% to 80%. Keep in mind, veterans can still qualify for these exemptions just as any other citizen by meeting the disability or age requirements. Income ceilings based on a percentage of county median household income are added to each threshold category as follows for tax collection year 2020. So rather than the \$30,000 income threshold. "Income threshold one" is equal to the greater of income threshold one for the previous year or 45 percent of county median household income. Rather than the \$35,000 income threshold. "Income threshold two" is equal to the greater of income threshold two for the previous year or 55 percent of county median household income. Rather than the \$40,000 income threshold. "Income threshold three" is equal to the greater of income threshold three for the previous year or 65 percent of county median household income.

Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center – Isaiah Bryant and Marcus Dallas

- The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) launched its new and improved Veterans Community Care Program on June 6, 2019, implementing portions of the VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act of 2018 (MISSION Act), which both ends the Veterans Choice Program and establishes a new Veterans Community Care Program.
- The MISSION Act will strengthen the nationwide VA Health Care System by empowering Veterans with more health care options.
- If veterans have old Choice authorizations, those authorizations are still valid.
- Under the new Veterans Community Care Program, Veterans can work with their VA health care provider or other VA staff to see if they are eligible to receive community care based on new criteria. Eligibility for community care does not require a Veteran to receive that care in the community; Veterans can still choose to have VA provide their care. Veterans may elect to receive care in the community if they meet any of the following six eligibility criteria:
 1. A Veteran needs a service not available at any VA medical facility.
 2. A Veteran lives in a U.S. state or territory without a full-service VA medical facility. Specifically, this would apply to Veterans living in Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire and the U.S. territories of Guam,

American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

3. A Veteran qualifies under the “grandfather” provision related to distance eligibility under the Veterans Choice Program.
4. VA cannot furnish care within certain designated access standards. The specific access standards are described below:

Drive time to a specific VA medical facility: To equal thirty-minute average drive time for primary care, mental health and noninstitutionalized extended care services and sixty-minute average drive time for specialty care. Note: Drive times are calculated using geomapping software.

Appointment wait time at a specific VA medical facility: Twenty days from the date of request for primary care, mental health care and noninstitutionalized extended care services, unless the Veteran agrees to a later date in consultation with his or her VA health care provider. **Twenty-eight days** for specialty care from the date of request, unless the Veteran agrees to a later date in consultation with his or her VA health care provider.

5. The Veteran and the referring clinician agree it is in the best medical interest of the Veteran to receive community care based on defined factors.
6. VA has determined that a VA medical service line is not providing care in a manner that complies with VA’s standards for quality based on specific conditions (**Does not apply to WA State**)
 - The MISSION Act Strengthens VA’s ability to recruit and retain clinicians. Authorizes “Anywhere to Anywhere” telehealth across state lines. Empowers Veterans with increased access to community care and establishes a new urgent care benefit that eligible Veterans can access through VA’s network of urgent care providers in the community.
 - The Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center will be the test center for this new program. There may be issues with this new system as it is initiated and asks that everyone be patient as they make this transition.

Veterans Cemetery – Heidi Audette, DVA Communications Director

- The Washington State Veterans Cemetery is located near Spokane in Medical Lake.
- Burial Benefits include:

Interment in veterans cemetery
Plot

Government marker

Memorial Service to include Military Honors, authorized by fed statute

Perpetual care of veterans cemetery

Presidential Memorial Certificate (PMC)

Burial Flag (funeral director or US Post Office)

- Eligibility:

Active Duty service

Minimum Length of service requirement

Honorable or General discharge

Guard/Reservists – activated (federal) with qualifying characterization

Federal Burial Allowance – contingent on service connected disability and cause of death being attributed to disability (\$300 to \$2,000), may cover transportation costs

Veterans qualification is precondition for a spouse or child to qualify

Vet does not have to be interred at a state or national cemetery for the spouse to be interred there (example vet's burial at sea)

Adult children, disabled before the age of 21 – very case specific, medical documentation must support

- Recommend submitting pre registrations to ensure eligibility
- The comital shelter has now been completed and provides an enclosed space with heat during the winter months.

WDVA Veterans Services Division and Homeless Veteran Services – Steve Gill, DVA Veteran Services Administrator

- Manages DVA field service and VSO programs (i.e. VFW and American Legion).
- We offer fiduciary services for veterans who are unable to manage their finances. 300 veterans currently are enrolled in this program. Most of these veterans live independently in their community.
- Transitional Housing Program. We have 100 beds of transitional housing. Beds are located in Western WA however; veterans in Eastern WA can apply for transitional housing. Most stay for 9 to 12 months and often find permanent housing.

- DVA collaborates with WorkSource to help assist veterans with finding employment.
- Veterans Innovation Program: A grant that can be received to meet short term needs. Typically, this is a one-time grant to help veterans get on their feet. We collaborate with WorkSource with this program (they provide the case management).
- Currently nationwide, 25% of veterans receive their veteran benefits. We are working to increase this number and our goal is to reach 30%.
- Will work with new County VSOs as established per new legislation.
- Counseling and Wellness Program: We have contracted PTSD Counselors, and other programs (Vet Corps) that provide mental health services to veterans.

Employment – Brandon Harting, WorkSource Colville

- Works with veterans and employers to hire veterans.
- Assesses a veteran’s ability in an effort to assist with finding employment.
- Looks for businesses that hire veterans and connects veterans to veteran friendly businesses.

Spokane County Regional Veteran Service Center – Cat Nichols, Director, Spokane County Regional Veterans Service Center

- We opened our new center on March 1 and located in Spokane Valley with a goal to open a regional service center that assists Eastern Washington veterans.
- The center has five registered VSOs on site to assist veterans with claims.
- On Sep 21, there will be a Veterans Stand Down here in Colville at the Northeast Washington Fairgrounds. The event is open to all veterans (from any state) as well as to the spouses of deceased veterans. Lunch will be provided.

Mobile Veteran Center – Eliseo “Joe” Dumlao, Veterans Outreach Specialist at the Spokane Veterans Center

- Vet Centers are community-based counseling centers that provide a wide range of social and psychological services, including professional readjustment counseling to eligible Veterans, active duty service members, including National Guard and Reserve components, and their families. Readjustment counseling is offered to make a successful

transition from military to civilian life or after a traumatic event experienced in the military. Individual, group, marriage and family counseling is offered in addition to referral and connection to other VA or community benefits and services. Vet Center counselors and outreach staff, many of whom are Veterans themselves, are experienced and prepared to discuss the tragedies of war, loss, grief and transition after trauma.

- Vet Center Eligibility: All Veterans are encouraged to seek Vet Center services. Any Veterans and active duty Service members, to include members of the National Guard and Reserve components, are eligible if any of the following applies:

Have served on active military duty in any combat theater or area of hostility.

Experienced a military sexual trauma.

Provided direct emergent medical care or mortuary services, while serving on active military duty, to the casualties of war, or

Served as a member of an unmanned aerial vehicle crew that provided direct support to operations in a combat zone or area of hostility.

Vietnam Era Veterans who have accessed care at a Vet Center prior to January 1, 2004.

- Vet Center services are also provided to family members of Veterans and Service members for military-related issues when they aid in the readjustment of those who have served. This includes bereavement counseling for families who experience an active duty death.
- Readjustment Counseling is focused on combat veterans (to include drone operators) and those who have experienced Military Sexual Trauma. Readjustment Counseling is strictly confidential and files are not shared with the Federal VA.
- Vet Center Program is part of the Federal VA but separate from the VA Hospital located in Spokane.
- The Mobile Vet Center provides readjustment counseling and information resources to Veterans across Washington State. Like community-based Vet Centers, Mobile Vet Centers focus on services that help Veterans make the difficult transition between military and civilian life.

Q&A – Facilitated by Rufus Hoefler

Q: How long is the backlog for community care program?

A: About thirty days (answer provided by VA MISSION Act team)

	<p>Q: Regarding the drive criteria, are there any special considerations for weather or road construction?</p> <p>A: Not necessarily. The program uses a Microsoft map program and uses a thirty day drive time average.</p> <p>Certificate of Appreciation Presentation to American Legion for hosting.</p> <p>Meeting adjourned.</p>