



STATE OF WASHINGTON

## VETERANS AFFAIRS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

*PO BOX 41150 • Olympia, Washington 98504-1150 • (800) 562-2308*

### VAAC TOWN HALL AND WOMEN VETERANS FORUM

**September 4, 2024**

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

American Legion Post 34, Pasco

**10:00 am – 12:30 pm VAAC Town Hall**

#### **American Legion Post 34**

1029 W. Sylvester St.

Pasco, WA 99301

#### **MINUTES**

Welcome, Land  
Acknowledgement,  
Introduction of VAAC  
Members, Invocation, Pledge  
of Allegiance

- Ron Black called the Town Hall to order
- Acknowledged the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation.
- Gave an Invocation and led the pledge of allegiance.
- Introduced 3 VAAC Members in Attendance and one WVAC member.

Introduction Guests

Ron Black made introduction of guests:

- Senator Matt Boehnke
- Representative Stephanie Barnard
- Representative April Connors
- Representative Mari Leavitt
- Benton County Commissioner Jerome Delvin
- Legislative Assistant to Senator Patty Murray, Nicole Rees

Director David Puente

- Welcomed and thanked all for coming.
- Thanked community for its support to Veterans and Veterans programs.
- Mentioned community visits WDVA attended on Tuesday.
- Talked about the Tri-Cities Cemetery that WDVA is still working towards.

Scott Kelter, Medical Center  
Director at JMW VA Medical  
Center

#### Projects at JMW VA Walla Walla campus

- Bldg. 86 status
- Seismic upgrades
- Expansion of Richland VA Clinic
  - Adding 3,900 usable sf of Behavioral Health and PT.
  - Projected opening in summer of 2025.
- Update on New Tri-Cities Clinic
  - Plans to add specialties including radiology, optometry, dental, audiology, prosthetics, home-based primary care, laboratory and pharmacy services.
  - Proposed location to be identified by April 2025.
  - Goal to open in 2028.

#### Reached 2<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the PACT Act.

- VA has enrolled 739,402 Veterans, 161,706 of those enrollments exclusively due to the PACT Act.
- More than 800,000 Veterans in priority groups 7 & 8 have received a priority group upgrade.
- Section 103 of Act was expedited.
- JMW VA has been holding/attending numerous events to educate veterans.

#### WDVA Program Overview

#### Leland Cooper – Outreach Program Coordinator

- 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
  - The goal is to increase residential stability.
  - Increase their skill level.
  - Assist them in permanent housing.
  - Assist in obtaining employment.
- State Veterans Cemetery
  - Armed Forces License Plates help support the State Veterans Cemetery
- Veterans Services
  - Claims assistance through Veteran Service Officers (VSO)
  - Currently 23 county Veteran Service Officer (VSO) agreements with 30 out of 39 counties being served.
  - Have MOAs with 7 out of 29 federally recognized Indian tribes.

- Veterans Service Programs
  - Veterans Innovations Program (VIP) – assists post 9;11 veterans facing financial hardships.
  - Transitional Warrior Program (JBLM) – provides information about all available benefits.
  - 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 their families.
  - Veterans Training Support Center – no-cost training provided each month on a variety of topics.
  - Brain Injury and Recovery Program – supports and represents every veteran in WA that has incurred a brain injury.
  - Vet Corps – training through peer-to-peer support.
  - Veterans Peer Corps – provides training to community members.
  - Veterans Conservation Corps – opportunities for veterans to connect with nature.
  - Veterans Farm at Orting – place where veterans can lease fertile farmland.
  - Tobacco Cessation Program – helps connect veterans to resources.
- 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.
  - Apprenticeship Program – assists veterans in connecting with registered apprenticeships and other career-connected learning.
  - Veteran Owned Business (VOB) Program – recruits and enrolls veteran and service members in VOB certification.
- Definition of a Veteran – for purposes of state veterans’ benefits.
- Overview of “What is the PACT Act”

## Overview of CVSO Office & Services Provided

John Penney, County VSO

- Shared information on the PACT Act.
- Looking for a second County VSO, it will be a shared VSO between counties.
- Services 4-6 Veterans per day.
- Major roadblocks - addition

## JMW VA Community Care

Melissa Stack, Supervisor

- Urgent Care cannot refer you for services. Please contact your primary care or ER for referrals.
- Barriers in Tri-Cities
  - Cardiology
  - GI EGD/Colonoscopies
  - Neurology-Kadlec
  - Services are available at sister sites:
    - Seattle VA, Portland VA, Spokane VA and Boise VA

## Women Veterans Advisory Committee (WVAC)

Tzena Scarborough, WVAC Member

- Gave an overview of WVAC
- Spoke about past and future WVAC events
- If interested in joining, please contact.

## WDVA Suicide Prevention & Awareness

Jennifer Prewitt, Suicide Prevention Peer Specialists

- Purpose/Vision
  - To prevent suicide among Service Members, Veterans, and their families by fostering hope.
- Suicide Prevention Program Team
  - Four (4) regionally located Peer Specialists:
    - Northwest, Southwest, Central and Eastern.
- 988 Emblem
  - Funds go to community organizations that provide evidence-based Suicide Prevention programs to Veterans.
  - The first grant was awarded in May.
  - LEARN Trainings
    - Created by the UW School of Social Work
    - Steps
      - Look for signs, Empathize and Listen, Ask directly about suicide, Reduce the dangers, next steps.

## JMW VA Programs for Mental Health & Behavioral Health

Bobbi Goodson, MSW/LICSW Chief, Behavioral Health

- Available at Richland Clinic
  - Psychiatry, Psychology, Substance Use Disorder, Primary Care Mental Health Integration.
- Add'l services at Walla Walla

- Peer Support Program/Veteran Peer Support Specialists
- Recreation Services
- Residential Rehabilitation
- Crisis intervention and suicide prevention

Merilee Richardson, LICSW Suicide Prevention Coordinator

- Suicide Prevention
- 16 counties in WA, OR, ID
- Clinical Work
- Walk-ins
- Connect with those that have called 988, within 1 business day.
- Can text crisis line.
- New program – video chat.
- Suicide is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death for veterans under 45.
- Motto “Suicide is everyone’s business”

Lisa Maldonado, LCSW COMPACT Act Program Coordinator

- Veterans who are administratively eligible – in an acute suicidal crisis can present to any VA or non-VA health care facility.
- Covers up to 30 days of inpatient or crisis residential care.
- Up to 90 days of outpatient care.
- Prescription medication
- Statewide
- Covers whether 0-100% service connected.
- Unlimited access – allowed to use multiple times.

Worksource/Homeless Services

Scott Steward, Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Case Manager & Jose Sandoval, Local Veterans Employment Representative.

- All WorkSource programs and staff serve the Veteran population
- The Veteran and Military Families program is responsible for providing education and guidance when working with three populations related to military service: Veterans with defined “significant barriers to employment”, transitioning service members and both Military Spouses and some Spouses of Veterans – both of these groups of spouses must meet certain eligibility criteria.
- Priority of service with respect to any qualified job training program, that a covered person shall be

given priority over nonveterans for the receipt of employment, training, and placement services.

- Assists with resumes and mock interviews
- Helps to make them successful.
- Resources:
  - Shelter, etc.
  - Computer skills
  - Get them job ready.
  - Connects them with employment opportunities.

Closing and Meeting  
Adjourned

David Puente thanked the American Legion Post 34.

Adjourned – 12:40PM