



STATE OF WASHINGTON

VETERANS AFFAIRS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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

VAAC TOWN HALL AND WOMEN VETERANS FORUM

March 18, 2026

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

American Legion Post 127

10:00 am – 12:30 pm VAAC Town Hall

American Legion Post 127

21920 WA-9

Woodinville, WA 98072

MINUTES

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

- Shellie Willis called the Town Hall to order
- Chuck Whitman gave the Invocation and led the pledge of allegiance.
- Acknowledged the indigenous peoples who have lived and continue to live adjacent to the Salish Sea, the signatory tribes of the Treaty of Point Elliott of 1855. This land was historically a center for trade and exchange among many Salish Sea tribes and bands and we pay respect to elders past and present and to all Native peoples who continue to steward the land and live among us.

Introductions of Guests & VAAC
Members

Shellie Willis

- Recognized VAAC & WVAC Members in attendance
- Introduced David Puente, WDVA Director

WDVA Updates

David Puente

- Thanked the American Legion Post 127 for allowing us to use their facility and providing refreshments.
- Thanked guests and attendees.
- Noted that the WDVA is in addition to the Federal VA
- Federal VA broken down into 3 areas:
 - Veterans Health Administration
 - Veterans Benefits Administration – VBA
 - National Cemetery Administration

- WA State DVA 3 areas
 - State Veteran Homes (4)
 - Veterans Services and Counseling & Wellness – Claims Assistance
 - One State Veterans Cemetery
- Agency has 4 specific goals that direct our work
 - Save and Transform Lives
 - Respect, Empower and Inspire Everyone
 - Be the Leading State in Veterans Service Delivery and Outcomes
 - Operate Effectively and Efficiently
- We are currently working on our strategic plan that will guide our services from 2026-2029.
- We would like to hear from you on the following:
 - What's working
 - Where are the gaps
 - What would you like to see from us
- We met with Community partners yesterday to find what makes your community unique and to identify gaps in service and see where we might be able to help.
- Our visits included:
 - The Minority Vets Community Center
 - YWCA with services in both King and Snohomish Counties
 - The Veterans & Military Community Center at UW Bothell
- Gave updates on our 2026 Legislative Session and the budget.
- Asked attendees to sign up to receive our newsletter if you have not already done so, this way we can stay connected.
- Asked attendees to take a moment to fill out the survey before leaving today.

WDVA Program Overview and PACT Act

Steve Gill, Veteran Services Administrator and Tribal Liaison

- State Veterans Homes (4) – provide 24-hour nursing care to our Veterans
 - Spokane Veterans Home - Spokane
 - WA Soldiers Home – Orting
 - WA Veterans Home – Port Orchard
 - Walla Walla Veterans Home
- Transitional Housing Program (THP) – 2 locations
 - Port Orchard – 48 beds and 5 beds for Medical Recuperative Care.
 - Orting – 62 Grant & Per Diem beds, 20 Contract Residential Shelter Beds and 10 in Betsy Ross for women veterans.
 - 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 28 out of 39 counties being served.
 - Have MOAs with 10 out of 29 federally recognized Indian tribes.
- Veterans Service Programs
 - Veterans Innovations Program (VIP) – assists post 9/11 veterans facing financial hardships.
 - Transitioning 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.
 - Veterans Conservation Corps – opportunities for veterans to connect with nature.
- Transition, Readiness & Family Services
 - 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.
 - Women Veterans Program
- Definition of a Veteran – for purposes of state veterans' benefits <https://www.dva.wa.gov/definition-veteran>

VA Medical Center

Ryan Moore, Medical Director of Community Care

- Community Care
 - Handle about 40% 14k/month
 - Eligibility
 - Wartime – 20 days or 3 min.
 - Specialty – 28 days or 66 min.
 - Drive time – 60%
 - Best Medical Interest – changed
- Authorization Extension – 30 categories
- Billing - hope never run into issue
 - Always check that provider has authorization on file and it is current
 - Questions call regional billing center 877-881-7618
- New Platform – external provider scheduling
 - Working on growing the network 854 providers.

VA Women Veterans

Dr. Emily Ashbaugh, Medical Director of Women's Health

- Focus on clinical outcomes
- Share awareness with everyone
- 47k Women Veterans in Puget Sound
 - 19k enrolled; 3700 in King County
- Continue to do outreach
- Women have a reasonable mistrust; help spread the word.
- 18.5% on active duty are women
- 14% current veterans have access as men do and that are unique to them.
- What can't be offered in house find community partners for these specific needs for women.
- Over 100 PCPs in Puget Sound VA
 - American Lake
 - Seattle Campus
- June 12th Women Health & Resource Fair
- July 23 in Seattle.

Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)

J'myle Koretz, Legal Administrative Specialists

- Attends many events
- VA Rating System
 - Rule 2/17 interim rescinded on 2/27.
 - 94B Budget nearly all goes to veterans and families.
- New use of AI and its speculation of use.
 - Have not taken a human person out of the process.
 - AI marks pages for review
 - For more information on AI go to google rules using AI.

Women Veterans Advisory Committee (WVAC) Overview and Update

Julz Carey, WVAC chair

- Provided an overview of the WVAC program
- Volunteer program – currently 7 members
 - Goals
 - Help women identify as a veteran
 - Discuss benefits and assist in getting women connected.
 - Change public perception
 - Getting into the community.
 - Hold quarterly and yearly events.
- If you are interested in getting involved with the WVAC, please contact WDVA.

WDVA Suicide Prevention & Awareness

Dr. Peter Schmidt, Counseling & Wellness Program Administrator

- Vision is to prevent suicide among service members, veterans and their families.
- First step is talking about it.
- Team does outreach and stand downs.
- Shared map that covers the entire state with those who are responsible for specific areas.
- Highlights
 - Firearm Safe Storage – Commerce Grant for safe storage of firearms. Hand out gun lockboxes.
 - 988 Municipality Emblems – Have partnered with cities and counties to have these emblems on their vehicles.
 - Trainings
 - Provided 4 Combating Stigma trainings to the community in FY 25 with 45 participants.
 - Available to anyone interested either in person or virtually.
- LEARN Trainings
 - Created by UW School of Social Work
 - WDVA team can go anywhere to provide this training. Can be in person or virtual.

King County Veterans Programs Joanna Bomba, Veterans Initiative & Policy Manager

- Veteran Landscape in King County
 - Defined what a veteran is in King County
 - 99,376 Veterans in King County
 - 6,612 served in 2024
 - 3,100 families served in 2024
 - 832 experiencing homelessness daily
 - 80-100 are incarcerated
 - 3 Military bases bordering King County
 - 2 VA Medical Center

- Resources – Budget and Fund Sources
 - Veterans Relief Fund (VRF)
 - Veterans, Seniors & Human Services Levy (VSHSL)
 - FSHSL Funded Programs Eligibility
 - Current resident of King County
 - Served at least one day in the US Military
 - All Components (National Guard, Reserves, Active Duty)
 - Any Discharge status
- Veteran Support
 - King County Veterans Program
 - King County Veterans Re-entry Program
 - Veterans Served
 - Contract & Initiatives Team
- Walk-in Program
 - Emergency financial assistance
 - Employment assistance
 - Housing stability
 - Health & Wellness
 - Applying for State, Federal and Local Resources
 - Legal Issues
 - End of Life Burial Expenses
- Re-Entry Services
 - Incarcerated Veterans
 - Provides outreach to veterans in jail
 - 31% of US veterans have been arrested at some point in their lives.
- Investing in Community
 - LGBTQ+ Houring – work with Minority Vets Organization.
 - Legal air services

WorkSource

John Cruz, Veterans Case Manager

- Everett
 - 2 locations in King County
 - Workshops
 - Mock Interview Training
 - Case Management
 - WIOA – WorkSource Innovation and Opportunity Act
 - Job Fairs / Employer of the Day

Veterans Justice Outreach Program

Ned Gignous, Veterans Justice Outreach Coordinator

- Receive 50 referrals month both criminal and civil
- Total of 5 Social Workers

- Vet Treatment Courts
 - King, Pierce, Kitsap and Mason Counties
- Jail outreach in King County
 - Behavioral health/Substance
- Evergreen Treatment Program
- Deflection Initiative
- Wills & Escape Planning Events

Closing and Meeting Adjourned Adjourned at 12:30 PM