

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE READJUSTMENT OF VETERANS

February 07-09, 2023

Chula Vista Vet Center  
180 Otay Lakes Road, Bonita, CA 91902  
(In-Person & Closed)  
8:00AM – 4:00PM (PST)

**MINUTES**

**Tuesday, February 07, 2023:**

**Attendees:**

**Committee Members Present:**

Joseph Anderson  
Viviana Marcotte  
David Duren  
Erin Cook  
Jessica Dunn  
Michael Embrich  
Terry Schow  
Jara Monetathchi  
Isaac Pike  
Heather Nystrom  
Thomas Hall  
Gregg Orto

**Department of Veterans Affairs Staff Present:**

Richard Barbato, Designated Federal Officer, 10RCS.  
Andrew Tomacari, Alternate Designated Federal Officer, 10RCS.  
James Sardo, Director, District 5, Readjustment Counseling Service  
Frank Pearson, Director, VA San Diego Health Care System  
Daniel Wright, Mental Health Service Line, VA San Diego Health Care System  
Dawn Miller, Suicide Prevention Coordinator, VA San Diego Health Care System  
Niloofer Afari, Associate Chief for Mental Health, VA San Diego Health Care System  
John Bucholtz, Director, Chula Vista Vet Center, Readjustment Counseling Service  
Jelessa Burney, Advisory Committee Management Office

**Public Attendees:**

None.

**Opening Remarks:**

At 08:00 a.m., Designated Federal Officer Richard Barbato welcomed the Committee members, initiated with housekeeping items, to include that a portion of the meeting would be closed to the public. DFO Barbato spoke to the fact that normally meetings are open to the public, but as the Committee is conducting tours of VA facilities and participating in off-site events, tours of VA facilities are closed to protect Veterans' privacy and personal information. Meetings are closed in accordance with 5 U.S.C Sec. 552b(c)(6). Finally, DFO Barbato spoke to the fact that instructions were provided in the Federal Registry in the published Notice of Meeting.

Committee Chair Joseph Anderson called the Committee to order, and provided an overview of the meeting, took roll call to establish quorum, reviewed the over-arching objectives of the meeting.

**Presentation:**

DFO Barbato led the Committee in a review of the Agenda, Committee Objectives and Charter. He also provided an overview of the Committee Report process moving forward. Committee members then introduced themselves and provided some background and biographical information.

**Presentation:**

Chula Vista Vet Center Tour – Tour led by Vet Center Director John Buchholz.

The Vet Center Director then provided an overview of the Chula Vista Vet Center after the tour which included populations served, best practices and highlights. The Vet Center Director then went on to introduce members of his staff to include the Veteran Outreach Program Specialist (VOPS) and several Readjustment Counselors.

Questions from Committee members included:

Q: Jessica Dunn: Challenges being experienced with regard to staffing and demand?

**Presentation:**

The Chula vista Vet Center team then introduced a panel of Veterans who are consumers of services at the Chula Vista Vet Center. Each panel member introduced themselves in turn and shared their experiences.

DFO Barbato then opened-up for a Question-and-Answer block, there were no questions from the Committee at that time, but the committee thanked the Veterans for sharing their experiences.

*The committee then adjourned for a fifteen-minute break.*

*The committee re-convened after the fifteen-minute break.*

**Presentation:**

A team from the San Diego VA Medical Center then presented to the Committee consisting of the VA Medical Center Director Frank Person, the Associate Chief of Mental Health Niloofar Afari, from the San Diego VAMC Mental Health Service Line Daniel Wright and the Suicide Prevention Coordinator for the San Diego VA Medical Center, Dawn Miller. All spoke to their assigned areas, the collaborative relationship with the Vet Centers in the San Diego Area, and overall areas that they as a medical center are focusing their efforts on.

DFO Barbato then opened-up for a Question-and-Answer block, there were no questions from the Committee at that time.

Questions from Committee members included:

Q: Michael Embrich: What is the threshold for acute care?

Q: Heather Nystrom: Who monitors acuity decompensation of individuals presenting for services?

DFO Barbato then thanked all for their time and for sharing their expertise.

*The committee then adjourned for a fifteen-minute break.*

*The committee re-convened after the fifteen-minute break.*

Committee Chair Joseph Anderson re-capped the days presentations and covered what would be heard from the next day.

The Committee adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

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February 07-09, 2023

San Marcos Vet Center  
1 Civic Center Drive, Suite 150, San Marcos, CA 92069-2934

VBA Regional Office San Diego  
8810 Rio San Diego Drive, San Diego, CA 92108  
(Closed & In Person)  
8:00AM – 4:00PM (PST)

**MINUTES**

**Wednesday, February 08, 2022:**

**Attendees:**

**Committee Members Present:**

Joseph Anderson  
Viviana Marcotte  
David Duren  
Erin Cook  
Jessica Dunn  
Michael Embrich  
Terry Schow  
Jara Monetathchi  
Isaac Pike  
Heather Nystrom  
Thomas Hall  
Gregg Orto

**Department of Veterans Affairs Staff Present:**

Richard Barbato, Designated Federal Officer, 10RCS.  
Andrew Tomacari, Alternate Designated Federal Officer, 10RCS.  
James Sardo, Director, District 5, Readjustment Counseling Service  
Leah C. Levine, L.C.S.W., VA Liaison for Healthcare, Naval Medical Center San Diego  
Sydney Barnwell, Director, San Marcos Vet Center, Readjustment Counseling Service  
Jelessa Burney, Advisory Committee Management Office

**Public Attendees:**

Brigadier General Jeffrey D. Smiley, Commander, California Army National Guard  
Captain Michael Ungureanu, Aide-de-camp California Army National Guard  
Virginia Wimmer, Dep. Secretary for Women Veterans, California Dept. Veterans Affairs  
Commander Nelly Rice, USN Balboa MTF  
Marcus Pace, Navy Wounded Warrior Program  
Ellyn Caprara, Navy Wounded Warrior Program

**Opening Remarks:**

At 08:00 a.m., Designated Federal Officer Richard Barbato welcomed the Committee members, initiated with housekeeping items, to include that a portion of the meeting would be closed to the public. DFO Barbato spoke to the fact that normally meetings are open to the public, but as the Committee is conducting tours of VA facilities and participating in off-site events, tours of VA facilities are closed to protect Veterans' privacy and personal information. Meetings are closed in accordance with 5 U.S.C Sec. 552b(c)(6). Finally, DFO Barbato spoke to the fact that instructions were provided in the Federal Registry in the published Notice of Meeting.

Committee Chair Joseph Anderson called the Committee to order, and provided an overview of the meeting, took roll call to establish quorum, reviewed the over-arching objectives of the meeting.

**Presentation:**

DFO Barbato led the Committee in a review of the Agenda, Committee Objectives and Charter. He also provided an overview of the Committee Report process moving forward. Committee members then introduced themselves and provided some background and biographical information.

**Presentation:**

San Marcos Vet Center Tour – Tour led by Vet Center Director Sydney Barnwell.

The Vet Center Director then provided an overview of the San Marcos Vet Center after the tour which included populations served, best practices and highlights. The Vet Center Director then went on to introduce members of his staff to include the Veteran Outreach Program Specialist (VOPS) and several Readjustment Counselors.

Questions from Committee members included:

Q: David Duren: Question regarding caseload per counselor.

*The committee then adjourned for a thirty five-minute break.*

*The committee re-convened after the thirty five-minute break.*

**Presentation:**

The Commander of the California Army National Guard, BG Jeffrey D. Smiley spoke to the committee regarding the relationship between the CA Army national guard and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, to include Readjustment Counseling service (Vet Center Program).

Questions from Committee members included:

No Questions from the Committee were brought forward.

**Presentation:**

Virginia Wimmer, Deputy Secretary for Women Veterans, California Dept. Veterans Affairs, addressed the committee on relationship between the CA Department of Veterans Affairs and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, to include Readjustment Counseling Service (Vet Center Program).

Questions from Committee members included:

No Questions from the Committee were brought forward.

*The committee then adjourned for Lunch.*

*The committee re-convened after Lunch.*

**Presentation:**

Annual assessment and Operations Plan Review – Richard Barbato, Designated Federal Officer & Joseph Anderson, Committee Chair.

Mr. Barbato and Mr. Anderson reviewed with the committee the Annual Assessment of Committee Activities for Calendar year 2022 and reviewed the Operations plan for 2023.

Questions from Committee members included:

No Questions from the Committee were brought forward.

**Presentation:**

23<sup>rd</sup> Report Process and Committee Discussion – Richard Barbato, Designated Federal Officer & Joseph Anderson, Committee Chair.

DFO Mr. Barbato and Committee Chair Mr. Anderson reviewed the process of

Questions from Committee members included:

There were no questions from the Committee.

**Presentation:**

The next presentation came from Commander Nelly Rice, USN Balboa MTF, Marcus Pace, Navy Wounded Warrior Program, Elyn Caprara, Navy Wounded Warrior Program and Leah C. Levine, L.C.S.W., VA Liaison for Healthcare, Naval Medical Center San Diego. Presentation focused on the DoD transition and warm hand off to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs of transitioning servicemembers. Particular attention was given to referral channels to Readjustment Counseling Service.

Questions from Committee members included:

There were no questions from the Committee, but discussion regarding the four recommendations the Committee will work towards followed.

*The committee then adjourned for a ten-minute break.*

*The committee re-convened after the ten-minute break.*

Committee chair Joseph Anderson then led the committee in a round-table discussion of the presentations the committee had received so far.

Committee Chair Joseph Anderson then reviewed the plan for the breakout sessions that would be used the next day.

The Committee adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

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VBA Regional Office San Diego  
8810 Rio San Diego Drive, San Diego, CA 92108  
(Closed & In Person)  
8:00AM – 4:00PM (PST)

**MINUTES**

**Thursday, February 09, 2023:**

**Attendees:**

**Committee Members Present:**

Joseph Anderson  
Viviana Marcotte  
David Duren  
Erin Cook  
Jessica Dunn  
Michael Embrich  
Terry Schow  
Jara Monetathchi  
Isaac Pike  
Heather Nystrom  
Thomas Hall  
Gregg Orto

**Department of Veterans Affairs Staff Present:**

Richard Barbato, Designated Federal Officer, 10RCS.  
Andrew Tomacari, Alternate Designated Federal Officer, 10RCS.  
James Sardo, Director, District 5, Readjustment Counseling Service  
Michael Fisher, Chief Officer, 10RCS  
Matthew Newman, Strategy & Analysis Officer, 10RCS  
Gary Jarrell, Executive Assistant, Chief Officer, 10RCS  
Jelessa Burney, Advisory committee Management Office

**Public Attendees:**



None.

Committee Chair Joseph Anderson initiated the meeting, took roll call to establish quorum facilitated a brainstorming session to determine the four to five topics the Committee would like to focus on for the next committee report.

**Presentation:**

Dr. James Sardo, District Five Director for Readjustment Counseling Service (RCS), presented to the Committee on Vet Center Operations to include coverage area, outreach, staffing, caseload and the implementation of the RCS approach utilizing Community, Connection and Camaraderie.

Questions from Committee members followed regarding:

Caseload, Staffing, recruiting and retention of staff.

**Presentation:**

Mr. Michael Fisher, Chief Officer Readjustment Counseling Service checked in with the committee members on the meeting(s) so far, provided follow-up to questions raised at the November meeting in Washington D.C. and provided the committee an opportunity to engage with questions they had.

*The committee then adjourned for a ten-minute break.*

*The committee re-convened after the ten-minute break.*

**Committee Discussion:**

Committee DFO Richard Barbato and Committee Chair Joseph Anderson then reviewed the meeting concept for the remainder of the day, in crafting the 23<sup>rd</sup> Report. Committee Chair Joseph Anderson Broke the Committee up into working groups, Committee DFO Richard Barbato moved the committee members virtually into their assigned groups for the first block. During this breakout group discussion occurred in preparation of the FY23 Committee report and associated recommendations. Breakout groups focused on the following:

Group 1 – Partnering and Referral from the Defense Health Agency.

Group 2 – VA DoD Transition assistance Program

Group 3 – Recruiting & Retention of Staff within the Readjustment Counseling Service

Group 4 - How can VA Best partner with Veteran Service Organizations

The committee then adjourned for a ten-minute break.

The committee re-convened after the ten-minute break.


High level / committee wide breakout groups occurred for discussion and composition of the FY23 Committee report and associated recommendations.

Breakout sessions ended, and the Committee came together for final discussion and brief out / review of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Report composed.

Committee Chair Joseph Anderson provided closing remarks.

DFO Richard Barbato provided closing remarks.

The committee adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JA', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Joseph Anderson, Committee Chair

28 FEB 23  
Date