

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
VETERANS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON REHABILITATION (VACOR)

**COMMITTEE MINUTES**  
November 18 - 19, 2020

Virtual Meeting  
Washington DC

**ATTENDEES**

**Committee Members Present:**

1. Scott Trimarchi - Chair
2. Emily Kimmitt - Vice-Chair
3. Kathy West-Evans
4. Leonardo Pandac
5. Michael Carroll
6. Katheryn King
7. Nate Todd
8. Ron Milam
9. Robert Hines

**Ex-Officio Members Present:**

- Jerry Elliott
- William Streitberger, Department of Veterans Affairs
- Michael Williams

**Members Absent:**

- Frances Siu
- Adam Popp
- Letitia Brown Osburn
- William Metheny
- Hugh Berry

**Department of Veterans Affairs Staff Present:**

- Latrese Arnold, Designated Federal Officer (DFO)
- LeGuster Seawright, DFO
- David Smith, DFO

**Public Attendees:**

- Bruce McCarthy

# Department of Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee Management Guide

**Wednesday, November 18, 2020**

## Welcome/Opening Remarks:

Mr. Scott Trimarchi, Chair, called the Committee to order at 10:47 am (EST). Mr. David Smith, DFO proceeded with roll call of members present. The August 18-19, 2020 minutes were reviewed and approved.

The Committee members received an introduction of **Ms. Margarita Devlin**, the Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits (PDUSB), who addressed the Committee.

PDUSB Veteran Benefit Administration remarks: an overview of benefits and priorities. VBA benefits that serve Veterans holistically were highlighted:

- Compensation: initiate the rehabilitation process with a disability decision and rating associated with the disability.
- Administrative Review: Veteran appeals with one of the three levels of reviews.
- Home Loan Guaranty: assist Veterans with purchasing homes with no down payment in most cases. Special Adapting Housing and Housing Grant Authorities are also included in this program to assist Veterans with home adaptations to accommodate their disability.
- Veteran Readiness and Employment: education, employment and independent living benefits.
- Transition Economic Development: manages the transition assistance programs (TAP) including GI Bill and other economic development programs. Many Veterans were not taking advantage of the VR&E program upon transitioning from active duty, which lead to VR&E changing its name to Veteran Readiness and Employment and being translated into new curriculum material in the TAP.
- Education GI Bill: education training benefits.
- Medical Disability Examiner: created a new office to oversee Veterans disability impacted by COVID-19. With congressional authority and budgeting, VBA is on track to conduct disability exams timely. There are a few congressional mandated exams that will be done in the new healthcare space, such as prisoner of war exams.
- Pension and Fiduciary: to assist war time Veterans with receiving a pension if they do not have a service-connected disability and support services.
- Life Insurance: benefits sometimes limited and time restricted. This is also discussed during TAP.

Solid Start Program: Veterans who have separated from the military are contacted in 90 days after separation and again at 180 days to make them aware of VA benefits. Veterans are connected to benefits they are entitled to and given the opportunity to

discuss their experiences with transitioning from active duty. This program also prioritizes Veterans who have mental health diagnosis within the last year prior to separation from service. This is another opportunity to make Veterans aware of VA benefits and programs like VR&E.

### Three Priorities of Services

- Delivery in a manner that honors Veterans
- Fraud and waste
- Collaboration

### Open Discussion: Reviewing all aspects of rehabilitation

- Special Adapting Housing (SAH) Grant
- What is the Veterans experience in utilizing SAH
- Mental Health stigma reduction program
- Emergency Service/Natural Disaster

### Public Comments:

- Bruce McCarthy

### VAHCS Briefings:

- **Dr. Thomas F. Klobucar**, DFO and Executive Director of VHA Office of Rural Health. In 2006, a law was passed that created the Office of Rural Health to conquer some of the challenges such as geographic and distance barriers, limited broadband coverage and social determinants of health. The VA Office of Rural Health was established to research issues affecting the rural Veterans, develop innovations to overcome access challenges and spread the system wide. Some of the challenges have not changed significantly over the past 10 years. 57% of rural Veterans are enrolled in the VA for rural healthcare while thirty-seven percent of urban Veterans are enrolled. This reflects the positiveness of utilization of healthcare in the rural population. Another challenge is mental health care which is very limited. More than 90% of rural counties have no mental health providers which is an issue.

The mission is to improve the health of our American Veterans to thrive in their rural communities. The plan is to promote federal community care solutions, reduce rural health care workforce disparities, and enrich rural Veteran health research and innovations. Additionally, the VHA Office of Rural Health has an advisory board that was mandated by the Secretary of VA but not created by Congress.

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- **Dr. Lynda Davis**, Chief, Veterans Experience Office. In 2015, the Veteran Experience Office (VEO) was established to hardwire the “voice of the Veteran.” VEO has applied the best practices of customer experience in data, tools technology and engagement across VA to offer ease, effectiveness and emotional resonance in VA’s delivery of care, benefits and services for all our Veterans. In 2018, Secretary Wilkie made customer service VA’s number one priority not only for Veterans but for their families, caregivers, survivors, and for employees to ensure their best customer experience when receiving or delivering services.

One of their accomplishment include communicating with Veterans and caregivers about their specific care needs and services over 32 million times through tailored VEText messages during COVID-19.

### Open Discussion:

- VACOR Membership Retention and Recruitment
- Interviewing for new members possibly during mid-January 2021

### VAHCS Briefings:

- **Mr. William Streitberger**, Acting Executive Director Veteran Readiness & Employment (VR&E) Service. VR&E service has achieved several initiatives under Mr. Streitberger’s leadership. In response to COVID-19, VR&E implemented emergency policies in support to sustained economic security, developed and conducted a virtual operations management training conference and pivoted to 100 percent virtual service delivery model. VR&E modernization updates include e-Authorization/e-Invoicing, Case Management System, Electronic Virtual Assistant and VA Video Connect.

### Working Sessions:

The Committee discussed today’s briefings and current and potential VA partnerships.

The Committee recessed for the day at 4:04 pm (EST).

**Thursday, November 19, 2020**

### Welcome/Overview:

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Mr. Scott Trimarchi called the VACOR meeting to order at 11:00 am (EST). Mr. Scott Trimarchi lead the discussion on comments and feedback from Wednesday's meeting. The agenda was reviewed.

### VBA Briefings:

- **Mr. Anthony Love**, DFO of Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans. This advisory committee is comprised of 15 individuals who has an interest to end homelessness among Veterans. The committee's goal is to improve VA programs to end or prevent homelessness for Veterans who are at risk or homeless. The committee members determine their site visit locations by the following three indicators: locations where Veteran homelessness ended, locations with promising practices that minimize homelessness, and locations that are struggling with ending homelessness. Site visit locations are planned two years in an advance. During the site visits, the committee works close to the local VA. When possible, "A Lived Experience Panel" is invited. The local case managers invite Veterans who have experienced and overcame homelessness to participate as a panelist. These Veterans will talk about their experience with VA, make suggestions on creative ways on what could be done better, and what they would recommend to the Secretary. One of the struggles that the committee's face is that most shelters will not allow Veterans to bring their belongings or pets. The committee has a website that features the mayor's challenge to end homelessness, highlighting the communities that the committee worked closely with, best practices, and partnership with local government to improve homelessness.
- **Mr. Timothy Johnston**, Supervisor of VR&E Employment Service. In 2019, VR&E conducted an analysis of the value that Employment Coordinators (EC) added to the overall performance of program outcomes. VR&E found that employment services required a structured environment for ECs to include a standard position description, performance standards aligned to the expectations of the role and resources necessary to carry out their responsibilities.
- **Dr. David Chandler**, Acting Deputy Chief of Patient Care Service Officer for Rehabilitation & Prosthetic Services, and **Dr. Judy Schafer**, DFO, Advisory Committee on Prosthetics and Special-Disabilities Programs. This Advisory Committee is a twelve-member statutory committee created by Congress in 1992. The scope of the advisory committee is to consult with the Secretary of VA about adequate funding and treatment capacity for the programs that are represented. One third of all Veteran receiving VHA services see a rehabilitation provider and 54% receive prosthetic and sensory aids. The committee advises the Secretary of VA on prosthetic programs and special disabilities programs. The goal of the committee is to meet the medical rehabilitation and prosthetic

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needs of all Veterans and provide life-long support including the most vulnerable with special needs.

### Public Comment:

- Bruce McCarthy

### Working Sessions:

- Explored topics such as mental health, homelessness, employment and employability among Veterans on the West Coast.
- Center of Innovation, Health Economic resources, Center of Education. Center of Innovation should be a field visit agenda item.
- Focal point topics: Employment Service and Mental Health over the next year or two.
- Journey map – how is the map is being utilized by the VA to identify Veterans. Journey map should be designed for internal VA staff and stakeholders.

Field visit location suggestions: Massachusetts, Arizona, Maryland, Texas or California.

### Next Meeting:

- Virtual administrative meeting the first week of February
- Virtual field visit the first week of April 2021 (April 7-9, 2020)

The Committee adjourned at 4:05 pm (EST).

### **Submitted:**

 1/8/2021

Mr. Scott Trimarchi  
VACOR Chair

Ms. Latrese Thompson  
VACOR DFO

