

Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs Minutes
02 December 2016
VA Regional Office
Lakewood, CO 80228

Members and Guests

Members Present:

Duane Dailey, Chair
Rene Simard, Vice Chair
Hollie Caldwell, Secretary
Patricia "Pat" Hammon, Member
William "Robby" Robinson, Member
Jack Rudder, Member

Members Absent:

Robert "Bob" McLaughlin, Member

DMVA Staff Present:

Mickey Hunt, DMVA Deputy Director
Ben Mestas, CDVA Director
Gail Hoagland, DMVA Grant Administrator
Carissa Snyder, CDVA Administrative Assistant

Guests Present:

Tammy Bellofatto, Colorado Coalition for the Homeless
Anton Borchers, Denver VARO Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment
Crystal Colussi, Sobriety House
Robert Kenshalo, Denver VARO Veterans Service Representative
Renaye Murphy, Director, Denver VARO
Andrew Post, Denver VARO Loan Guaranty Officer
Theresa Rudder, president-elect of Colorado Federation of Women's Clubs and Jack's wife
Catherine Wright, Denver VARO Assistant Veterans Service Center Manager

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Dailey at 0900 hours. Proceedings began with a recitation of the pledge of allegiance and a moment of silence for POWs, MIAs, and troops overseas. Mr. Dailey then invited introductions from around the room. He announced that the meeting would open with presentations from the attendees from the Denver VARO as several of them had another meeting to attend that morning.

VARO Presentations

Ms. Murphy began by welcoming the Board to the regional office. She said that FY 2016 ended on 01 October, marking the seventh consecutive year with more a million claims processed. Meanwhile the claims inventory has seen a decrease, with 884,000 claims pending at the end of 2012 to 380,000 at the end of 2016. Processing takes an average of 109 days, decreased from the VA's previous processing time of 239 days. Claims are now processed electronically which has helped with speed. Dependency claims submitted electronically can be processed within 24 hours. Appeals production has increased by 11%

over last year. Mr. Robinson inquired what the average processing time in for an appeal, but that information was not immediately available. Ms. Murphy also reported improvements with the VA 800 number, with the 60% blocked call rate not at less than one percent and the average wait time less than four minutes.

Mr. Post provided information from Loan Guaranty. The Denver VARO has shown 100% performance on all matrices in regard to the Native American Direct Loan program. The office works with 390 recognized tribes in the region and is required to provide outreach to all. This is the largest number of tribes encountered by any regional office. The next nearest is the Phoenix office with 160 tribes. Specially Adaptive Housing applications require contact within 30 days and the Denver VARO is 99.5 compliant with the timeline. The region's default resolution rate is 83.3%. Mr. Robinson asked what percentage of VA loans are in default. Mr. Post replied that it is 1.1% for this region, compared to a default rate of .89% for prime mortgages, 2.11% for FHA, and 6.9% for subprime. The region closed 94,000 loans in FY 2016, 28,000 of which were in Colorado. The average mortgage with a VA guaranty in Colorado was \$285,500. 411 Colorado properties were foreclosed.

Ms. Wright said that as of 13 May claims are processed through the National Work Queue, so claims can be worked at any regional office that has the availability. There is a current effort to balance the availability with geography, so while approximately 24% of the cases worked by the Denver VARO were Colorado veterans, that percentage is expected to increase to 60% in FY 2017. In FY 2016 the Denver VARO processed 20,115 original claims, 5,000 dependency claims and 1,700 appeals with a 97.1% accuracy rate. Ms. Murphy added that the Denver and the Cheyenne VAROs have the highest production rates in the country. Mr. Dailey said that veterans have complained about having VA calls cut off and inquired if there is a way for veterans to directly contact the Denver VARO. Ms. Wright said she would provide Mr. Mestas with the number for the Denver VARO front office so that it can be distributed to the Board. She also suggested that veterans who have questions for the VA try emailing their inquiries, since those must be responded to within five business days.

Mr. Borchers said that VR&E saw 478 positive outcomes in FY 2016. The census revolves since clients stay in the program from three to four years, but typically the yearly total is around 3,500. Mr. Simard asked what the current completion rate is. Mr. Borchers said that number is not tracked because goals differ, but they measure positive outcomes instead. Positive outcomes include employment, independent living, maximum rehabilitation, and continuing education. The goal for 2017 is to increase last year's positive outcome rate by 10%. The average income of veterans entering the program is \$600-\$800 a month, while the average income of those with a positive outcome is \$3,500-\$4,000 a month.

Mr. Hunt said the Colorado Joint Budget Committee meeting on 29 November evidenced a lot of interest among legislators in homeless veterans. The current estimate is that there are approximately 400,000 veterans in Colorado. Ms. Murphy agreed that homelessness is an ongoing concern and that the Denver VARO does have a homeless coordinator for the state. It is hoped that programs such as My VA and telehealth clinics help to reach those homeless populations.

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Dailey provided a correction to the meeting minutes from 09 November 2016 and the minutes were approved as corrected.

Board Member Comments

Mr. Robinson reported that the Veterans Community Living Center Board of Commissioners met at Homelake in November. The 75% rule continues to be an issue, with the example at Homelake of a waiting list of 17 people even though beds are available. Mr. Hint said that a teleconference was held with Senator Bennett's office on 30 November regarding this topic, and that DHS has provided the senator's office with a white paper. The next teleconference is scheduled for 26 January. The Board was willing to entertain a motion of support. Mr. Robinson moved that the Board support and pursue efforts to increase flexibility in waivers for state CLCs in regard to the 75% rule. Mr. Simard seconded and the motion carried.

Ms. Hammon reported that 20 schools in Eagle County and the surrounding area participated in Veterans Day programs and presentations. She was featured in a TV spot for the county cable network, in which she was able to discuss the Board and her role. This was also covered in a local paper and she will supply the link to the article. Eagle County Veteran Services has been supporting training classes for police and other first responders about how to react to veterans with PTSD and/or TBI who are in crisis.

Ms. Caldwell said that the Platte College School of Nursing now has a volunteer partnership with the Comitis Crisis Center in Aurora.

Mr. Simard thanked Mr. Robinson for speaking at the annual Veterans Salute in Aurora on 09 November. He reminded the Board of the current effort at DU to create a school of military psychology through the Sturm Family Foundation, and said that the plan includes a mental health clinic in Aurora for veterans their families. In conjunction with this effort, DU is offering matching funds for students using Yellow Ribbon funding.

Mr. Rudder said that the San Luis Valley has its annual Veterans Day Parade with participants ranging from the Honor Guard to Cub Scouts.

Mr. Dailey said the Veteran Day event at Snow Mountain Ranch in Granby had 370 in attendance, including CDVA Deputy Director Diane Ricci.

Community Providers

Ms. Colussi reported that Sobriety House's Veterans Assistance Grant has helped the organization extend care to veterans who expended their VA benefit or otherwise cannot access care. Sobriety House offers both residential and outpatient care for substance abuse treatment, with case management for patients to help coordinate resources. Ms. Caldwell asked how the agency measure positive outcomes. Ms. Colussi said their measurements are sobriety, employment, housing, and community involvement.

Ms. Bellofatto said that at the last Board meeting she had promised to bring statistics from the homeless veterans reintegration program provided by the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, also supported by a Veterans Assistance Grant. Since July 2016, the coalition has helped 70 veterans, 39 of whom are now employed. Besides direct employment assistance the coalition helps with tools, training, licenses, and clothing. They also participated in the Denver Stand Down in November. Ms. Colussi said that there were fewer veterans than expected in attendance at the Stand Down, but that may be attributed to the fact the Project Homeless had a job fair at the convention center on the same day. She asked for the Board's assistance to facilitate communication to avoid future conflicts, and Mr. Hunt offered the Department's support as well. Mr. Robinson asked if the number of homeless veterans in Colorado has

increased. Ms. Bellofatto said that is the impression gained from the increase in VASH vouchers distributed this year, but that specifics will be available once the annual Point In Time survey is conducted in January.

The Board recessed briefly at 10:35 a.m. and resumed labor at 10:43.

Reports

Mr. Hunt said the Colorado Joint Budget Committee meeting on 29 November focused largely on the issue of homeless veterans, and that legislators are interested in how to find out how many currently uncounted veterans are in Colorado. The proposed veterans one-stop in Grand Junction is still below the funding line. UVC is expected to present legislation this session. Mr. Robinson added that he attended the UVC legislative meeting and there is interest in presenting legislation designed to make the Board a Type I board. Mr. Hunt agreed but stated it is financially not feasible. The UVC will also seek change to law to simplify the grant program. Mr. Robinson asked if a copy of the state auditor's findings has been made available to UVC members and Ms. Hoagland confirmed that it has. Mr. Hunt also informed the Board that a new FTE has been added in Grand Junction so that IDs can be made there.

Mr. Mestas said eight of the state's nine Stand Downs are complete, with the Windsor Stand Down scheduled for April. The deadline for counties to submit the data for their semi-annual state payment closes on 07 January.

Ms. Hoagland said that is compiling myths regarding the grant program to create an FAQ and asked the Board to contribute any false notions they encounter. This year there have been misconceptions in regard to transportation, gift cards, and advances, some even from current grantees. Ms. Caldwell asked when the deadline is for grantees to submit for reimbursement and Ms. Hoagland said it is June 15. Mr. Dailey said he visited the VFW Department of Colorado after the November board meeting and confirmed that their frustrations are not with the grant itself but with the nature of their program.

Mr. Dailey said that UVC meetings are held on the second Tuesday of each month. Mr. Robinson added that the next meeting of the Executive Committee will be held on 13 December.

Upcoming Meetings

The Board discussed and confirmed dates and location for upcoming meetings:

January 06, 2017	Trinidad
February 03, 2017	Fort Lyon
March 03, 2017	Aurora
April 07, 2017	Centennial
May 05, 2017	Durango
June 02, 2017	Rifle

Adjournment

There being no further business, Mr. Simard made a motion to adjourn. It was seconded by Mr. Rudder. The meeting adjourned at 11:25 a.m.