

Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs

02 August 2024

315 Main St

Sterling, CO 80751

Opening

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 am. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited, and a moment of silence was held for POWs, MIAs, those deployed, their families, and those killed in the line of duty.

Members Present

Sheila Scanlon, Chair

Lacey Golonka, Secretary

Longinos Gonzalez, Member

Jasmine Motupalli, Member

Howard Richards, Member

Raymond Taylor, Member

Board Members Absent

Sean Maday, Vice Chair – Excused

Staff Present

Angela Ingalls, Veterans Memorial Cemetery of Western Colorado
Administrator

Carissa Snyder, CDVA Operations Coordinator

Lisa Stamm, CDVA Grants Administrator

Glen Marciniak, Northeast Regional VSO

Beth Maxwell, CDVA Operations Office Manager

Eric Winterrowd, CDVA Veteran Services Supervisor

Guests Present

Keith Ball, Army Veteran

Derek Boroff, Logan County Veterans Service Officer

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Mary Cornum, Veterans Coalition of the San Luis Valley
Destry De Wolf, Huerfano County Veterans Service Officer
Pat Hammon, Eagle County Veterans Service Officer, VCLC Board of
Commissioners, UVC Representative
Mikael Madsen, San Miguel County Veterans Service Officer
Cynthia Meyer, Teller County Veterans Service Officer
Richard Nagley, Veterans Coalition of the San Luis Valley, American Legion VSO
Roxie Smith, Crowley County VSO
Laura Stanley, Mesa Assistant County Veterans Service Officer
Marsha Unruh, Home Front Military Network, Program Director

Approval of Minutes

Corrections to the draft of the June 2024 minutes were provided. Mr. Richards made a motion to approve the minutes as corrected. Ms. Golonka seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Corrections to the draft of the July 2024 minutes were provided. Mr. Taylor made a motion to approve the minutes as corrected. Ms. Golonka seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Public Comments

Mr. Nagley notified the board of a recent article in the local paper. The article stated that completion of a satisfaction survey was required in order to receive assistance through the Veterans Assistance Grant. Ms. Scanlon inquired about the article and who was interviewed for it. Mr. Nagley said that the article did not specify who was interviewed, but he assumed it was the county veterans service officer since the article stated multiple details of the grant process.

Ms. Stamm said that the satisfaction survey has been administered since 2014 as method track outcomes and to determine the effectiveness of the grant funds. The survey is supposed to be given after the veteran receives

services, not prior to their services, as the survey is asking for feedback of services provided from the underserved veteran.

She said that the client satisfaction survey was discussed at several office hours and at trainings, and that all grantees have a copy of the survey. The survey is not mandatory and returning the survey does not determine whether the veteran will receive services.

Ms. Scanlon asked Mr. Nagley what action he would like to have happen. Mr. Nagley said that he would like clarification because when he spoke with the county service officer, he was informed that the survey is required before receiving assistance.

Ms. Scanlon asked Ms. Stamm if she can speak with the CVSO. Ms. Stamm stated she spoke to the VSO about this issue on 1 August and confirmed that he is now aware that the survey is not mandatory. She will send an e-mail to ensure that all grantees know that the survey is not required. However, each veteran is encouraged to complete the survey as it provides statistical information that is important when asking for additional spending authority and when the grant reports are generated.

Mr. Nagley also had a correction for the June minutes. He provided the correct identification of guest Hall Sutcliffe. Mr. Sutcliffe is a 92-year-old Korean veteran with three Purple Hearts from Chosin Reservoir.

Legislation

Ms. Snyder said that the provisions of Senate Bill 24-004 go into effect on August 6, which will coincide with the release of the updated version of the Division's Policies and Procedures. Significant changes provided by the bill are the requirements for a county veteran service officer, whether appointed, hired under an appointed county veteran service officer, to be certified by the state and to be eligible for accreditation by VA's Office of General Counsel. This brings Colorado law into alignment with federal code. This change has

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been communicated to the counties through Division trainings, Wednesday coffees, and through e-mail. This is also included in the updated Policies and Procedures manual.

The Division's intent is to give any VSO or county which is currently out of compliance at least 90 days to come up with a plan to comply. The hope is the 90-day window will give those out of compliance some time to become compliant and mitigate some of the impact on counties. Most of the counties which will be affected by these changes have already acted.

There are four counties that want to participate in the working group to discuss SB24-004 and the payment structure for the Long Bill stipend. The group will hold its first meeting in August. Mr. Cowan will be the chair of the working group.

VCLC Board of Commissioners

Ms. Hammon said that the Board of Commissioners for the Veterans Community Living Centers (VCLCs) meets every three months. The next meeting is scheduled for 4 September. The VCLCs have been making two big efforts, one is to get more local staff and the other is to increase admissions.

The VCLCs continue marketing efforts at hospitals, with medical providers, and within their communities. Each VCLC is arranging meetings with referral partners, including VA clinics, home care companies, and hospice companies. The VCLCs are also beginning to set up meetings with all the state VSOs in each county so they can reintroduce each team to the local county VSOs. The VCLCs would like to work with the VA and local VFW, American Legion, and other veteran organizations. Ms. Hammon brought some pamphlets and information which she will leave with the VSO in Logan County and the VSO supervisor.

Staffing issues continue to be a problem. However, in July there was a wage increase for all state employees. The VCLCs have increased new hiring through job postings which reflect the new compensation ranges.

The VCLCs are working with the Department of Military and Veteran Affairs (DMVA) to implement the Veterans Mental Health Services program. This program allows for funding for mental health services for veterans who reside in a VCLC and is paid for out of encumbered funds within the Department of Military and Veteran Affairs.

Rifle VCLC: Rifle is a skilled nursing and rehab and their memory unit is not open yet. The recent COVID outbreak has been resolved. Rifle has also admitted 11 new residents since the start of July with five more residents pending.

Fitzsimons VCLC: The outbreak at Fitzsimons is still active. Prior to the outbreak, Fitzsimons had admitted seven new residents and has two future residents pending.

Homelake VCLC: Homelake has suffered several deaths due to age. They have admitted three new residents in their assisted living and independent living programs and two new residents in their skilled nursing program.

Florence VCLC: Florence has suffered from a few deaths and has admissions of three new residents. They also have four referrals.

Spanish Peaks VCLC: Spanish Peaks does not have a recent report.

United Veterans Coalition (UVC) of Colorado

Ms. Hammon that UVC will meet next week and will be deciding what their priorities are with their goals. The UVC has a list of goals and the primary organizations will be submitting what they feel is the list of priorities.

Standing Reports

DVA: Ms. Snyder presented on behalf of the Division Director. The Division is considering additional development of the position description for Regional Veterans Service Officers to include competency-based levels within the job classification. RVSOs could then be classified within their job classification according to experience and other skills and abilities. Mr. Cowan intends to use data-driven decisions to further the Division's goal of prompt, efficient, and uniform service. The objective is to utilize staff positions to maximize benefits to veterans no matter where they live in Colorado, and to ensure that veterans are getting the same level of service wherever they live. This might include a peer review process for VSOs in the future.

The Division is also interested in creating an easier process for veterans to get disabled veteran license plates. The current requirement is for a veteran to be rated by VA as 50% permanent. Unfortunately, 50% permanent is not a rating that the VA gives. The Division is considering ways to make the benefit easier to access.

Mr. Cowan visited the Veterans Community project in Longmont during July looking at their tiny home village. He is also working with Manny Menendez at the Veterans Justice League, which assists incarcerated veterans. On 19 July Mr. Cowan was at the Home Front Military Network and met with NACVSO state representative Marshall Bosworth while in Colorado Springs.

Mr. Cowan also met with the director and assistant director of the VA Denver and Cheyenne regional offices at the VA Regional Office in Lakewood. The VA will assist with the annual training conference in September. The National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) will be attended by several staff members including Mr. Cowan, Mr. Winterrowd, Ms. Ingalls, Ms. Snyder, and Women and Marginalized Veterans Coordinator Amy Demenge. Ms. Demenge will also attend the annual conference of the National Association of State Women Veteran Coordinators.

The policies and procedures manual update is scheduled for release on August 6. Ms. Scanlon said that everything has been sent from the board. Ms. Snyder confirmed she has received the boards information for the policy and procedure manual.

Veterans Services

Mr. Winterrowd said that there have been efforts in several counties to ensure that County VSOs are working the minimum 1,000 hours required to be eligible for VA accreditation. VSOs are making great progress at moving through the training program. Currently four of the six regional VSOs are fully operational. This means they are trained with VBMS and Share access.

CDVA leadership will meet 26 September at the Western Region One Source. The clearinghouse has been released. The Division sent an e-mail to CVSOs notifying them of the updates and the clearinghouse is operational on vets.colorado.gov, the CDVA website.

RVSO Hannah Eddings has begun training with left seat/right seat for claims processing this month. RVSO Ray Odom is going to do an event at CSU Pueblo and moved moved into his office 1 July.

Veteran services had an in-person team meeting on July 25. Issues discussed included the current organizational structure, lack of redundancy, and county VSO accreditation rates and PIV card access. Currently approximately 67% of Colorado VSOs have VA desktop access. which allows them to get VBMS and Share access. This number should rise this fiscal year, increasing the state's ability for prompt and efficient service on a uniform basis to all Colorado veterans.

Ms. Scanlon asked what was meant by redundancy. Mr. Winterrowd said that the Division does not have a system in place to back up any of the veteran services positions. Veteran Services does not have any staff member that is cross trained with another's program and there is no reinforcement when a

staff member is on extended leave. Mr. Winterrowd said that VSOs can share the workload, but all positions are one level deep.

Mr. Winterrowd said that fall training is scheduled for 17-20 September and Training Officer Kristy Cunningham has been working on the logistics. It will be held at a hotel with audio and visual professionally set up and staffed. Contracting the audio and visual was an important decision as the training will be hybrid. Through the Division's agreement with NVLSP, they have confirmed eight hours of training and a BVA judge will attend as well.

Veterans Services is updating the training for new VSOs, moving away from the 30-60-90 model as the timing has been proven to be inconsistent with county needs.

Ms. Demenge attended the Veteran Community Project Longmont Village tour with Mr. Cowan. She is also working with a nonprofit that helps veterans with supplies for their pets. The quarterly newsletter has been distributed. She trained to be an ambassador for Reach a Vet/Teach a Vet (RATAV). This program is available at most VA medical facilities and allows veterans can receive an escort to their appointments through this program. Ms. Demenge also had a meeting with TAG in the last month and conducted a TAP brief at the Air Force Academy.

The appeals assistant position closed. There are more than the required number of applicants, causing the applicants to take an exam to establish a referral list for interviews. Mr. Poteet conducted 32 hearings and 18 grants of benefits. It is generally 8-12 months from hearing until a decision is made.

Veterans Memorial Cemetery

The VMC has not seen any changes with their volunteers, VA work study, or community service program. Their college intern is expected to start next month. The VMC does have one grounds crew member on family leave.

Program Assistant Jennifer Lesko's last day was the end of July. Board member Howard Richards visited the cemetery on July 26.

The cemetery's total internments are at 6,264. Total internments to date for the calendar year are 189 with a total of 34 for this fiscal year. The cemetery submitted 21 reimbursements totaling \$19,705. The military funeral honors stipend program paid out \$4,250 for the month of July.

The cemetery administration building had some HVAC issues. There was a water line break in the wall and they are still trying to locate that water line without ripping out the wall completely. The cemetery will have some facility work this month and in September as well.

In regard to VTF-funded projects, the cemetery is reviewing power washer purchasing options. The monument sign repairs are waiting to be scheduled. The replacement of security cameras is scheduled. The ice machine has been purchased.

Trees for Saluting Branches are currently being purchased. Masonry and concrete repair should commence next week or the week after. The contracted vendor that the cemetery employed has lost the veteran applicant for that position due to a health issue. This project is now on hold while the vendor identifies a new candidate.

Upcoming events for anyone planning to visit the Grand Junction area include: veteran's appreciation outreach at the downtown farmer's market on August 29, quarterly military honors on October 7, and the Veteran's Day parade on November 9.

There was a question about the lithograph project on the agenda. Ms. Ingalls said that the vendor is committed and the contracts signed, but the project is on hold until the right employee is hired. The updates will continue to be in Ms. Ingalls' report and removed from Old Business.

Grants

Ms. Stamm said that Joni Fernandez will start as Program Assistant working on the VCLC Mental Health Program on August 12. The final execution rate for FY24 was 95% for VAG and 90% for VTF. The execution rate for VAG increased by 8% and 3.5% for VTF. Grants has increased the goal for the execution rate to be higher in FY25.

The Grants office held two office days this month discussing reimbursement issues, the new online reporting form, reporting definitions on duplicated veteran count, talked about the survey process, reporting requirements, and underserved veterans.

July held two kickoff trainings the 15th and 18th. Grantees had 100% attendance causing a makeup session not to be warranted. The kickoff training will have a pre and post survey for grantee organizations this year, to help assess knowledge gained. Grants is also collecting other feedback on additional training the grantees would like to see throughout the year.

Ms. Stamm has been working on survey development. She has sent out several surveys in the month of July. The grantees are starting to enter their quarterly and their cumulative final reports through a web-based platform. Grantees should receive a copy of their completed reports upon submission. The Board can access the grant reports through the link in the board report. Ms. Stamm is looking at other grant platforms that other state agencies are using, to be more efficient with the process moving forward.

Grantees will receive financial updates on two separate documents. This should make the reconciliation process smoother. The board will also receive the documents so they can see the individual execution rates for each grantee as well.

The grantees have requested to hold two networking sessions prior to June 30, 2025. One session will be virtual and one in person, with the location to

be determined. Once grantees have assisted in determining what in person training they would like, the grants office will be able to determine a location. Grantees will hopefully learn from each other and receive a wider variety of feedback.

Ms. Tozzie has been updating documents in compliance with the Americans with Disability Act (ADA), including forms, handbooks, and training materials.

The Board adjourned for a 13-minute break at 10:20.

Old Business

Veterans Clearinghouse: Please send updates to Mr. Winterrowd at eric.winterrrowd@dmva.state.co.us, to be made in late September or early October.

Albuquerque support of rural veterans: The VA regional offices in Denver and Albuquerque will be holding the townhall in Durango the 22nd and 23rd of August from 0900 to 1400.

Mr. Taylor would like Mr. Cowan and Mr. Richards to meet with the new director for a meet and greet and to discuss veteran issues with the Albuquerque VA including the length of time it can take for travel claims to be received, as well as other trends and gaps in service over the courses of the four years.

CVSO Flyer: Mr. Maday has submitted the draft to Mr. Winterrowd.

Women Veterans Subcommittee: Ms. Scanlon and Ms. Golonka, along with other committee members, met with representative from the Eastern Colorado Health Care System to discuss how to synergize women veteran programs within the Eastern Region VA system, Next meeting will be virtual to discuss the framework of those working in women healthcare programs and to ensure that the VA programs are advertised to both the CVSOs and women veterans.

Veteran Protected Status: Nothing to report.

IBM: Mr. Maday said that the annual Inclusion Body Myositis (IBM) patient conference is being held in Baltimore, September 6-8. The conference will include a breakout session related to veterans organized in partnership with the TMA Military Veterans with Myositis Affinity Group. Mr. Maday won't be at the conference but will seek out feedback from the session and will report back to the CBVA team.

New Business

Departmental Annual Reports

The Board has received the annual report from the Department of Natural Resources. Ms. Snyder will send it out to the whole board for review. Ms. Scanlon asked Board member to consider what should be included in the annual report.

Legislative Cycle

Transportation to Specialty Care: One of the recurring issues encountered by the Board is specialty care in rural regions. Legislatively, there is little the Board can assist with as the problems are VA-based. However, a symptom of this problem is transportation to specialty care. There was discussion about how VAG and or VTF funds could be used to transport veterans to specialty appointments.

Ms. Stamm confirmed that grant funds could be used for this purpose. Mr. Nagley said that the problem with transportation to specialty care appointments is the cost. Ms. Motupalli has submitted a proposal which has language around mobilized specialty care to rural areas, as there are mobile specialty care nonprofits within the state of Colorado. Many of these nonprofits are not focusing on veteran care because they're assuming that the VA is caring for the veterans.

Including widows as eligible VAG recipients: The board asked about the eligibility of surviving spouses of veterans to receive VAG assistance. Ms. Stam said that the current statute allows VAG funds to be used for family counseling.

There was also discussion about whether to include National Guard members who have not served for 24 months on Title 10. Ms. Stamm asked the board about adding language to assist living family members of veterans.

Board Member Remarks

Howard Richards: Mr. Richards traveled to Grand Junction and met with the Ms. Ingalls at the Veterans Memorial Cemetery. On 10 August there is a combination of the Southern and Mountain Ute color guards participating in a ceremonial parade in Gallup, NM. 22-23 August there is a town hall meeting in Durango. 26 August two Ute tribes are hosting a Ute Mountain powwow. On 26 August, the US Attorney's Office out of Durango has contacted both the Ute Mountain and Southern Ute to do an opening ceremony, traditional ceremony to open their meeting. On 30 August, the Southern Ute Veterans Association is hosting the annual Riders on the Run in Ignacio. Dr. Garcia and Mr. Richards are in the process of scheduling a meeting in Denver. Mr. Richards would also like to meet with Ms. Hammon to discuss the UVC. The southern Ute veterans are trying to host a veteran day powwow, which will be two days.

Mr. Richards also said that the Southern Ute veterans, along with the Ute Mountain veterans have their own tribal member health benefit plans. These plans cover all costs regarding all injuries or medical issue that they may have. With these benefits it is difficult to have the veteran receive care from the VA; as the VA health care system is more difficult to navigate.

Ms. Scanlon advised the Colorado Board of Veteran Affairs, we must work with the state, when it comes to the VA. As a board we can assist veterans by promoting and utilizing the VTF and VAG grants. With Mr. Taylor's

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assistance and the division, the board can hopefully find a pathway to meet with the VA in addressing all our issues here in the state of Colorado, not only for the tribal veterans, but all veterans. The Board would like to collaborate with the Division and the VA to create a plan to get rural veteran's care.

Lacey Golonka: Ms. Golonka attended the Veterans Community Project (VCP) event in Longmont and was excited to see them grow. VCP is a nonprofit that builds transitional tiny houses for veterans and assists veterans to long term housing.

She is on the VFW Post 1 Foundation Board. The foundation has a program called Leadership Veteran, <https://leadershipveteran.org/programs/ldvet/>, specifically for veteran serving organizations in communities throughout Colorado. This program is a very beneficial to nonprofits that need some assistance managing their finances, coming up with better ways to partner with corporations, volunteering, raising funds, writing grant applications, strategic planning guidance and things of that nature. Leadership Veteran is a nine-month program, training nonprofit management, networking, and building connects with prominent community leaders.

Jasmine Motupalli: Ms. Motupalli said that VSOs or other nonprofits who would like to apply for Leadership Veteran only have a few more days. Ms. Motupalli contacted the program coordinator to ask that the Board be put on the newsletter distribution list.

Raymond Taylor: Mr. Taylor nothing to report for this month.

Longinos Gonzalez: On 28 July Mr. Gonzalez attended the 158th anniversary ceremony locally for the Buffalo Soldiers held by VFW Post 1. On 1 August he attended a H.E.R.O.E.S. Scholarship (Hometown Education Resources & Opportunities Empowering Servicemembers) This reception initiates their fundraising campaign for University of Colorado in Colorado Springs (UCCS) in an effort to bridge the gap between the tuition assistance funds for active-duty military to help cover annual tuition cost. There is about a \$3,000 per year gap for each active-duty member. 2 August is the assumption of command of Lt. Gen. Tony D. Bauernfeind, Superintendent of the Air Force Academy.

Shelia Scanlon: The week of 21 July Ms. Scanlon spent five days at U.S. Army War College in Carlisle, PA teaching a class on operationalizing women peace and security. She was able to live aboard the base and teach a master's program in an advanced seminar for their students. In late July Ms. Golonka and Ms. Scanlon attended the VA hospital discussion on women veterans.

Statewide Veteran Issues

Access to prescriptions: Mr. Taylor said that this is a federal issue and probably there is no action to take at the state level. Ms. Scanlon recommend taking this one off the list. Ms. Hammon suggested that the Board and veterans write to our senators and say that this issue needs to be examined.

Veterans on the fringes: Ms. Scanlon said that the Board needs to continue to work on this issue. It will require the Board, Division, and CVSOs working together to find and assist these veterans.

Homelessness: Ms. Scanlon said this issue will require additional discussion regarding how the state can assist with this aside from the VAG and VTF funds.

Access to Mental Health Services: The Board will continue to discuss this need, exacerbated by lack of accessibility.

Transportation: This can be addressed through VAG or VTF but can also benefit from further discussion.

Upcoming Meetings

The next meeting will be held on 13 September at the Windsor Readiness Center. Ms. Scanlon suggested holding the Board next meeting and annual training in Grand Junction on 3-4 October. November's meeting will be determined in September pending a list of Veteran Day events from the Veteran Services team.

Currently scheduled:

13 September – Weld County (Windsor Readiness Center)

3-4 October – Western Region One Source, Grand Junction

Adjournment

Mr. Richards moved to adjourn. Mr. Taylor seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 11:27 a.m.