

## **Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs (CBVA) Meeting**

**Date:** 15 November 2024

**Time:** 8:00 AM

**Location:** Western Region One Source, 482 28 Road Grand Junction, CO 81501

**Break:** 9:20-9:30

### **Members Present**

Shelia Scanlon, Chair

Longinos Gonzalez, Member

Sean Maday, Vice Chair

Howard Richards, Member

Lacey Golonka, Secretary

Raymond Taylor, Member

### **Members Absent**

Jasmine Motupalli, Member - Excused

### **Staff Present**

Parker White, DMVA Legislative  
Liaison

Darrin Collazo, Western Region  
One Source Administrator

Bruce Cowan Division of Veteran  
Affairs Director

Carissa Snyder, CDVA  
Operations Coordinator

Angela Ingalls, Veterans  
Memorial Cemetery of Western  
Colorado Administrator

Lisa Stamm, CDVA Grants  
Administrator

Eric Winterrowd, CDVA Veteran  
Services Supervisor

James Poteet, Appeals Specialist

Beth Maxwell, Program  
Assistant

**Guest**

Jim Cressman, Veteran

Pat Hammon, Eagle County Veterans  
Service Officer, VCLC Board of  
Commissioners, UVC Representative

Mary Cressman, Veteran Spouse

Duane Daily, Grand County Veteran  
Service Officer

Steve Otero, Gunnison County  
Veteran Service Officer

Chris Fick, Veteran

Jordan Sanchez

Dr. Tina Garcia, Paralyzed Veterans of  
America (PVA), Disable Veterans of  
America (DAV), United Veterans  
Coalition (UVC) Legislative Chair

Craig Rauwolf, Valley Veterans  
Recreation, Valley Wide, American  
Legion Veteran Service Office

Braydon Gear, VHA Outreach  
Coordinator

Mathew Tekansik, VA Deputy  
Director

**Approval of Minutes**

**September Minutes:**

- The minutes from the September meeting were approved by all with the changes discussed. Mr. Maday made the motion and Mr. Taylor seconded.

**October Minutes:**

- Mr. Maday made the motion to approve the October minutes with the changes discussed, which was seconded by Mrs. Golonka. Mr. Richards

abstained from voting, as he was absent at the October meeting. The motion was approved.

- Mrs. Golonka asked that the minutes be sent out by the Division of Veterans Affairs (DVA) the Monday before the board's next meeting as a word document.

### **Public Comments**

- Ms. Hammon reported that counties have been requesting a Board representative to attend their weekly Wednesday County Veteran Service Officer (CVSO) meetings, during "coffee time," as CVSOs are seeking to improve communication with the Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs (CBVA).
- Mr. Tekansik, From the Grand Junction VA, stated that the VA is remodeling the Grand Junction Emergency Room (ER) and the Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Montrose. The remodel will expand specialty care services.
  - Nucla will have a Mobile Care Unit for general practice and audiology appointments at the VFW post at the end of February.
  - Donations for the Mobile Care Unit are welcomed, but those planning to donate should contact Voluntary Services in advance.
  - VHA IDs that are 10 years or more expired can be renewed at VA hospitals or CBOCs.
  - On November 19, from 17:30 to 18:30, there will be a Women Veterans Town Hall in Montrose.

- Ms. Hammon shared positive feedback regarding the CBOC in Glenwood Springs, Colorado.

### **Guest Presenter – Jim Cressman**

Mr. Cressman, an Air Force veteran, has been living with Inclusion Body Myositis (IBM) for 10 years. He is struggling to obtain an adequate Compensation and Pension (C&P) exam, questionnaire, or proper coding for IBM.

IBM is a degenerative muscular disease caused by environmental toxins, and it is not currently recognized by the VA. Mr. Cressman has been advocating for recognition and appropriate treatment for several years, and he reported that others with IBM have been fighting the VA for up to 17 years.

Mr. Cressman is urging the Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs (CBVA) to assist veterans in getting IBM officially recognized by the VA.

While IBM is rare in the general population (affecting 1 in every million people), the incidence is significantly higher among veterans, with 189 per million veterans diagnosed.

### **Legislative Update – Parker White and Director Cowan**

- Mr. White stated - The Disabled Veteran License Plate (DV Plates) efficiency bill is part of a larger, confidential legislative package currently being refined for the next legislative cycle. Mr. White noted this year will be a tight budget year, which will present financial impacts and challenges.
- Director Cowan was able to report the goal of the Disabled Veteran License Plate bill is to remove the word “permanent” from the

eligibility criteria, allowing veterans to qualify for DV Plates by submitting only the VA Benefit Summary letter.

### **VCLC Board of Commissioners -Pat Hammon**

- The agenda for next month's meeting will include discussions on budget reductions, staffing concerns, and other cost increases.
- Due to ongoing budget constraints, the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) is considering staff reductions at the Vocational and Community Learning Centers (VCLCs). This matter will be further discussed by the Board of Commissioners at their upcoming meeting next month.
- The VA's contracts with other long-term care facilities are creating competition for residents at the VCLCs. Additionally, the VCLCs face challenges in competing with salaries offered by non-governmental facilities.
- At the federal level, it would be beneficial to adjust the percentage of non-veteran residents (spouses of Veterans and surviving Spouses of veterans) that the VCLCs are permitted to admit, to better manage resident populations.
- Members of The Adjutant General (TAG) and CBVA visited the VCLCs on October 24 and 25. During their visit, board members had the opportunity to see improvements made using Veterans Trust Fund (VTF) funds.

### **UVC Updates – Ms. Hammon**

- Regarding the United Veterans Council (UVC), there is no legislative update currently.

## Standing Reports

### DMVA/DVA - Bruce Cowan

- **Look, Listen, and Learn" Tour:** Director Cowan has been touring the Southeast and Northwest regions of Colorado as part of his "Look, Listen, and Learn" tour. Together with Mr. Winterrowd, he has gained firsthand insight into the needs of veterans across the state. During the tour, they also promoted the grants program and discussed funding opportunities available to rural areas.
- **Alamosa Grant Writing Needs:** In Alamosa, the county is seeking a grant writer to assist in securing funds for veterans' VA healthcare travel. However, there is a shortage of qualified grant writers in the region who are familiar with the federal grant process. Director Cowan and Mr. Winterrowd discussed how the CBVA offers a grant program that could support veteran-focused initiatives in areas like Alamosa.
- **Expanding Veterans Trust Fund (VTF):** Director Cowan expressed interest in expanding the VTF appropriation to include 501(c)(3) organizations, which would allow a wider range of organizations to apply for these grants and support veteran-related projects.
- **Legislative Update – Mental Health Care Bill:** The Mental Health Care Bill (KK) passed on November 5, which increases funding for veterans' mental health services. However, since KK is not specifically tied to the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA), the department is currently identifying gaps in services in order to help implement the new bill effectively.

- VCLCs Tour: Director Cowan, along with the TAG, Board members, and DMVA leadership, toured three of the five VCLCs. Unfortunately, they were unable to visit two of the centers due to a COVID-19 outbreak.
- Mobile DEERS Unit in Grand Junction: Director Cowan is working to establish a mobile Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) unit in Grand Junction to assist veterans with renewing their DEERS cards, improving access to critical services.
- Incarcerated Veterans at Englewood Penitentiary: Director Cowan and Ms. Hannah Eddings visited incarcerated veterans at the Federal Penitentiary in Englewood. The program that previously supported these veterans through a dedicated 1-800 number has been discontinued, resulting in a service gap for incarcerated veterans.

### **Western Region One Source – Darrin Collazo**

New Programs and Events: The WROS team has been working on launching new programs and hosting events aimed at supporting veterans and their families.

Marketing and Support Groups: WROS is actively working on enhancing its marketing efforts and developing new support groups. These groups are designed to offer veterans more tailored services and foster a stronger sense of community.

### **Veterans Memorial Cemetery (VMC) of Western Colorado – Angela Ingalls**

Meeting with Federal Cemeteries: The VMC recently met with representatives from federal cemeteries to network and discuss potential programs and collaborations. This meeting is part of ongoing efforts to strengthen partnerships and enhance veteran services.

Veteran Legacy Memorial: The Veteran Legacy Memorial is progressing well, with continued efforts to honor veterans' contributions and preserve their legacies. The project is gaining momentum and has received positive feedback from the community.

National Recognition: The work being done at the VMC has garnered national attention, highlighting the center's impact and innovation in veteran services.

### **Grants – Lisa Stamm**

- **VTF Annual Report:** The Board reviewed the Annual Report for the Veteran Trust Fund Grant (VTF), including survey results and data on women veterans who are currently receiving services. Other key points discussed included the consistency of the categories that grantees have requested over the years, which remain stable.
- **Updated Application for 2024:** The Board also reviewed the updated application for the new application year, which begins on December 1, 2024. Mr. Taylor motioned to approve the updated application, which has been condensed and now includes a simplified budget along with a QR code for easier access. Mr. Richards seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.
- **VCLC Amended Requests:** The Board reviewed several amended funding requests for Veterans Community Living Centers (VCLCs).
  - **Homelake:** Mr. Richards motioned to approve the purchase of 45 wardrobes in the amount of \$57,881.15, and Mr. Maday seconded. The motion was approved.



- Fitzsimmons: Mr. Maday motioned to approve the request for \$19,417.20 for carpet and landscaping, and Mr. Richards seconded. The motion was approved.
- Rifle: Mr. Richards motioned to approve the request, except for the lifts, which are considered medical equipment and not amenities by the VTF statute. This adjustment reduced the cost of the lifts by \$2,952, bringing the total requested amount to \$16,735.47. The request includes gaming equipment, table chairs, exercise equipment, planters, soil, and planting equipment. Mrs. Golonka seconded the motion, and it was approved.
- Bruce McCandless: There was discussion regarding the type of dining chairs requested for the VCLC. It was determined that the chairs are a taller option to accommodate higher dining tables and feature wheels and brakes for mobility and safety. Mrs. Golonka motioned to approve the request for \$20,320.00, and Mr. Taylor seconded. The motion was approved.

**CCVSOA/NACVSO – Marshall Bosworth**

- Mr. Bosworth retired from El Paso County on 8 November 2024.

**Old Business**

**Veteran’s Clearinghouse**

Marketing and Flyers: Mr. Maday has created a flyer for the Veteran Clearing House and will be designing a second flyer that includes a QR code for easier access to information. The Board requested a monthly report from Mr. Winterrowd to track website visits, which will help assess whether the flyers are effectively serving as marketing tools for the Veteran Clearing House.

Distribution of Flyers: The flyers will be distributed by CVSOs the VA Hospital in Grand Junction, and any other organizations interested in helping

distribute the materials. This broad distribution will help increase awareness and outreach to veterans.

### **Albuquerque VHA Support to Rural Veterans**

**Initial Meeting Overview:** The initial meeting was held via Webex for 30 minutes, serving as a brief introduction between Board Representative Mr. Taylor and the VA Director. It was noted that the VA Director is also a Primary Care Provider and continues to see patients in addition to his administrative duties.

**Discussion Points:** During the meeting, Mr. Taylor and the VA Director discussed several important topics, including travel claims, fax numbers, and the cost associated with these claims. They focused on finding common sense solutions to the issues veterans are facing. Additionally, the Director shared that the Albuquerque VA Hospital serves 66,000 veterans, underscoring the scale of services provided.

**Plans for Continued Conversations:** The meeting set the stage for ongoing discussions, which will involve other Veteran Service Officers (VSOs) and Regional VSOs to further address veterans' needs and concerns.

**Future Engagement:** The Board expressed interest in organizing a meet-and-greet event with the VA Director and the New Mexico State Veterans and Military and Veteran Affairs Advisory Board to strengthen relationships and improve collaboration.

### **Veteran “protected class” for number hires for FY AG’s office response**

- No update

### **Women Veterans Subcommittee**

- No update

## **IBM**

- Mr. Maday indicated that this topic was previously addressed during Mr. Cressman's remarks at the start of the meeting.

## **Access to Prescriptions Letter for Board Review**

- Letter has been sent this will now become an ongoing Agenda Item: The discussion regarding these issues will continue to be included on the agenda under Statewide Issues for future meetings.

## **Legislation for next Legislative Session**

- VAG Funding Increase Request: The Board is currently evaluating whether a formal memo to TAG is necessary to request a minimum increase of \$500,000 for the Veterans Assistance Grant (VAG) funding for FY 2027. This request will be included in the Annual Report for FY 2024.
- Proposed Changes to VAG: The Board discussed adding language to the statute for the VAG grants to include surviving spouses of veterans. However, the Board may wait until the next fiscal year (FY) to formally propose this change.
- Language Updates for Holistic Medicine and Immediate Family: The Board also expressed interest in revising the language regarding holistic medicine alternatives. Specifically, they would like to consider the term "immediate family" to encompass dependents living with the veteran. This change is part of a broader ongoing discussion that includes concerns about the "helpless child" designation from the VA, which remains under review.

- Motion to Add surviving spouses to VTF Eligibility: Mr. Taylor made a motion to include surviving spouses of veterans as eligible for VTF grants funds. Mr. Richards seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

## **New Business**

### **Addition of Cremation Services to be added to the approved allocation of VTF funds.**

- Cremation Services and VTF Funding: There was discussion about the potential to add cremation services to the list of expenses eligible for funding through the Veterans Trust Fund (VTF). While the VA offers survivor and burial benefits, with a reimbursement rate typically processed within four to six weeks, there are instances where families need immediate assistance. Although the VTF has covered cremation services in the past, it has been on a case-by-case basis.
- Motion to Approve Cremation Assistance: Mr. Taylor made a motion to allow VTF grant funds to assist with cremation services for up to \$2,000 as a last resort for families in need. Mrs. Golonka seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

### **Annual Report from Departments within the State**

- Assistance with Missing Reports: The Board requested that the DVA assist in obtaining the missing reports to ensure all necessary documentation is received for the creation of the Board's Annual Report.

## **Branding Success Stories**

VTF Funding for Social Media Management: The Board discussed using VTF funds to manage a Facebook page for the Board. The funding would cover the cost of managing the page, which could be handled by a DVA employee. Mr. Maday and Director Cowan will conduct further research and develop a plan, with the goal of launching the program in January.

## **Statewide Veterans Issues:**

**Access to Prescriptions; Veterans on Fringes: Homelessness; Mental Health Service; Transportation**

## **Veteran Benefits and Housing Assistance**

Mr. Taylor provided a summary of key factors that will help veterans understand whether they are eligible for VA benefits. A critical question is whether the veteran prefers to remain unhoused and whether they have any pets that need to be placed in a safe location. The VA uses the HUD-VASH program as its primary homelessness assistance program, and there is a local HUD-VASH office located at the WROS.

## **Upcoming Meetings**

Mrs. Scanlon stated that she would like the Board to review the bylaws once Mrs. Snyder has made the necessary adjustments, with the goal of having them approved in December.

### **Meeting Date**

### **Location**

13 Dec

Virtual

07 February 2025

Rocky Mountain Regional Hospital, Aurora, CO

07 March	TBD
04 April	TBD
April	VTF Sub Committee Meeting
02 May 2025	Denver – VTF Grants

**Adjournment:**

Mr. Richards made the motion to adjourn. Mr. Maday seconded the motion. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 11:38 pm.