



SOUTH DAKOTA VETERANS COUNCIL

The American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Veterans of Foreign Wars,
Paralyzed Veterans of America, Vietnam Veterans of America Chapters 1054 & 959
Military Order of the Purple Heart

MINUTES OF THE SOUTH DAKOTA VETERANS COUNCIL MEETING (SDVC), WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 16th, 2022, AT THE DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS 1519 W. 51st STREET , SIOUX FALLS

1. CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting of the South Dakota Veterans Council was called to order by President Connie Johnson at 9:01 a.m.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGINECE AND PRAYER:

Vice President Kevin Hempel led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance and a prayer.

3. ROLL CALL:

Secretary/Treasurer Marty Pennock called the roll call showing the following members present:

American Legion (TAL): Doug Feltman, Kevin Hempel, and Fred Nelson

Disabled American Veterans (DAV): Dan Francis, Gene Murphy, and Marty Pennock

Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW): Tom Hafner and Anna Arnold

Vietnam Veterans of America Chapters 1054 and 959 (VVA): Phil Braeger (1054) and Terry "Hawk" Mayer (959)

Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH): Connie Johnson

North Central Chapter Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA): Terry Paulsen and Lisa Cummings

Official Officers Excused: (VFW) Dave Baumiller, (VVA -1054) Jerry Denman, (MOPH) Bill Flippo, (MOPH) Jon Tilk, and (PVA) Mike Olson

There was a total of 32 present for the meeting (attached sign in roster).

4. WELCOME DISTINGUISHED GUESTS / VISITORS /ADMINISTRATIVE COMMENTS / ANNOUNCEMENTS

President Johnson welcomed members of the Council and Guests.

5. PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES:

President Johnson called on Secretary-Treasurer Pennock to read the minutes from the September 28th, 2022, SDVC meeting.

On a motion by (VVA) Terry Mayer and seconded by (DAV) Gene Murphy to waive the reading of the minutes from the September 28th, 2022, SDVC meeting, as they were mailed to members of the council, posted on the website and provided at the meeting. Discussion. Motion carried.

6. TREASURER'S REPORT:

President Johnson called on Secretary-Treasurer Pennock for a Treasurer's Report. Beginning Balance as of September 23rd, 2022, was \$12,724.96 and expenses of \$483.77 leaving a balance, as of November 15th, 2022, of \$12,241.19.

On a motion by (VVA) Terry Mayer and seconded by (VFW) Anna Arnold to approve the Treasurer's Report. Discussion. Motion carried.

7. INVITED GUEST SPEAKERS:

Acting Director SFVAHCS: Dr. Timothy Pendergrass covered in detail the following:

- PACT Act Screening – 620 Vets – 37% - slightly above National average
- Awareness Week – December 12-17 – Townhall – eligibility and enrollment
- VSOs – need to stress importance of PACT Act with Veterans

CITC Consult Data: (as of November 9, 2022)

- Active Consults: 2,444
- Pending Consults: 237
- Average number of consults submitted to CITC per day: 115
- Field Entry Date to Scheduled: 23 days (Nationally it is 26.5 days)
 - *What is this?* This is how long it takes from when a provider submits a consult for CITC to have an appointment. This includes the RCI processes and CITC processes.

CITC Call Center Data (as of November 9, 2022)

- Average Calls per Day - 233
- Average Wait Time – 28 seconds
- Longest Wait Time – 11:39 minutes
- Calls Answered - 98%

CITC Vacancies

- 13 scheduler (MSA) positions open with 9 candidates. They are expected to be onboarding over the next two months.
- We are taking two of the four open positions without candidates and are putting them online as remote. Other VISN stations are seeing success with this model. We feel positive we should fill the last two positions with the next cert we get from HR.

VEText & My Healthvet

Over the last month there has been an increase in the number of Veterans using VEText. VEText is used to track real-time appointments throughout the hospital and CITC. When a Veteran goes to an appointment they will receive a text message, usually the next day, asking if they went to their appointment. If the Veteran responds they did not go to their CITC appointment, CITC will follow up with the Veteran the next day to re-schedule their appointment.

NOTE: If a Veteran opts out of receiving text messaging, they will not get any reminders or follow up texts from VEText. If they choose to stop the messaging, it stops all future messages for all appointments. If a Veteran opts out from Sensitive Messaging, they will only be reminded they have an appointment. If they choose to have Sensitive Messaging the messages will tell them if it is a CITC appointment or Podiatry, etc.

Veterans are opted into all VEText messaging by default. If they wish to opt out, they can reply **STOP** to a message they receive and will be opted out of the Use Case(s) corresponding to the number they responded to (see table below). Replying **STOP ALL** will opt them out of all messaging regardless of which number they reply to. If Veterans would like to opt-into a use case, they must text **START** to the corresponding number shown in the table below:

| Number | Use Case(s) |
|--------------|--|
| 53079 | Appointments, Open Slot Management (OSM), and Community Care (CC) |
| 23229 | Ad-Hoc and Flu-Shot Outreach |
| 80728 | COVID Vaccine Outreach and Emergency Management (EM) |
| 53941 | Rx Tracking |
| 202-951-7856 | Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA) |
| N/A | Behavioral Health Lab (BHL) <i>Veterans will need to respond to a previously received message. BVA uses a pool of 10-digit numbers.</i> |

Using My Healthvet, Veterans may contact the CITC Department directly using Secure Message to ask questions about consults, set up appointments, or ask billing questions they may have. There are two choices under Secure Message for CITC: Billing or Questions.

- CITC uses My Healthvet daily and receives positive service comments. If you know Veterans that are busy and/or who prefer to communicate through electronic messaging, please get them set up in My Healthvet or have them stop by the My Healthvet Help Desk across from the Agent Cashier on ground floor.
- Everything we do for our Veterans begins with our people. Right now, we need more people. Hiring faster and more competitively is a top VHA priority for maintaining and improving our ability to provide the best care possible for Veterans. We must be laser-focused on recruiting and retaining the most talented people to accomplish our mission.

Onboarding Surg Event

VHA needs to hire approximately 52,000 employees per year over the next five years to keep pace with the increasing demand for care

During the week of November 14, every VA will conduct an Onboarding Surge Event to expedite selected candidates through the onboarding process. The event is focused on fast-tracking candidates' onboarding experience by coordinating all required pre-employment actions into a single-day event. Sioux Falls Surg Event will be held November 15, 2022, from 1:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Release of Information

ROI has been in a backlog. The HIM Chief is working the backlog along with a travel agent to assist in getting the backlog caught up. Two additional staff have been hired and starting within the month.

Veteran's may print from their medical record in My HealthVet and not have to request from ROI. Look for the blue button.

Flu Vaccine and COVID Booster

Veterans may request to have a flu vaccine and/or a COVID vaccine at any of their scheduled appointments, or as a walk in through Primary Care. The Moderna - Bivalent COVID booster is available to Veterans, spouses, and caregivers. We have dispensed 2,582 total COVID vaccines. In FY22 we administered 717 and already in FY23 we have given a total of 1,865 vaccines.

PACT Act Scam Sheet Provided - Attached

Medical Center Director / CEO BHVAHCS:

Director Curnes was unable to attend, and Dr. Pendergrass reported

My HealthVet Secure Messaging

Black Hills VA Health Care System was recognized nationally as being in the TOP 5 facilities to have a 0% escalation rate for secure messaging. Secure Messaging teams have three business days to respond to and manually complete a secure message. If the message is not completed in three business days, the message is considered escalated. The Black Hills staff responded to and closed more than 24,000 secure messages from Veterans.

Workload

The Black Hills VA has increased its workload by over 6% in the last year. The Rapid City CBOC has seen an increase of 23% in unique Veterans over the last 2 years and a 5% increase in Veteran visits over the last one year. VA Black Hills is actively seeking to grow our enrollment so every eligible Veteran knows we are here to provide them the services they have earned.

Enrollment Expos

BHVA is currently reaching out to eligible Veterans who are not using VA Care and providing them with services that the VA can offer them. We invite eligible Veterans to an enrollment event and are able to enroll them into VA and schedule their first appointment at the event. These expo events are being scheduled four times in November and hope to grow the program and expand into rural areas of our SD catchment area. Our goal is to take care of SD Veterans where they want to be seen.

Budget

FY22 budget 100% executed of \$373.5M.

- \$111.7M was CITC
- \$2M was for Equipment to include new hospital beds, ceiling lifts for patient rooms and mobile patient lifting equipment, etc.

Rapid City CBOC update

The new clinic is located at 2165 Promise Road in Rapid City. Drywall, paint and flooring are being installed currently in this 45,000 sq.ft. newly constructed building.

- Approximately 120 FTEE will be located at the new facility.
- Parking increased from 96 to over 300 spaces.
- GEO-Thermal system installed in the new clinic to use best practices in green technology to provide energy efficient solutions to heat and cool the building via Geo-Thermal pumps in the ground.
- Zero grade incline entrance for ease of access for wheelchairs.
- Covered drop off location to protect from weather elements.
- Increase in access allow us to meet the needs of Veterans by increasing PACT teams from 5 to 8 teams.
- Increase in Mental Health exam rooms to include cutting edge technology via biofeedback services that provide evidenced based treatment to Veterans experiencing PTSD and Military Sexual Trauma (MST).

- Addition of Women's Health Services specializing in provision of comprehensive care across the spectrum to treat and provide prevention services.
- Multiple specialty services to include: Audiology, Physical Therapy, Chiropractor, etc.
- Laboratory services will allow Veterans to receive their lab results at their clinic appointment with their clinician.
- Radiology services include X-ray, Mobile CT and MRI exams with potential to expand to include mammography services in future.

Appointment Letter/Transportation

Implemented an updated appointment letter to include DAV telephone numbers for Veterans who would like to schedule transport to their appointments. Feedback from the DAV indicated this has been a successful way to communicate this information to the Veterans we serve.

Visited with Mr. Post, DAV in regard to Sundance, WY visit at the VFW in regard to difficulty with transportation issues and working to implement transportation options through the DAV and the use of a vehicle from the Black Hills VA.

Partnering with DAV on a more streamlined and efficient manner to provide all the requirements in one appointment at the Black Hills Health Care System to qualify Volunteer drivers.

Staffing/Onboarding Events

Held recruitment hiring fairs monthly for the Black Hills VA rotating amongst our campuses at Fort Meade, Hot Springs and Rapid City. In October our hiring event was held in Hot Springs and 6 nurses were extended offers for employment on the spot.

Onboarding surge event is scheduled for the Black Hills on November 17th with over 40 prospective employees invited to attend to finish their onboarding requirements so they may begin to work. Prospective employees include: providers, nurses, EMS, N&FS workers, Social Workers and Medical Support Assistants (MSAs).

In addition we have hired a dedicated Nurse Recruiter who will actively seek out opportunities to bring new nurses to the VA.

PACT Act and C&P updates

Clinical reminders for Nurses and providers is in place for the assessment of Veterans for their exposure to toxins.

Second C&P provider which will focus on environmental exams is coming on board by mid December 2022. Other two providers have been offered and accepted positions with implementation by next year due to prior job notice requirements and moving to area.

Environmental Coordinator position is being classified through HR currently. MSA position has been offered and accepted and will onboard in next 30 days.

At this time, the Black Hills is performing 25% Audiology exams, 25% Dental exams and 50% Sleep exams. All other exams are being outsourced via the VBA contracts. Currently BHVA is planning a PACT Act Awareness event that will be held with employees and Veterans for mid-December. More information will be coming as we finalize the event.

GI Genius

Fort Meade started using a new program called GI Genius. This program assists doctors in polyp detection during colonoscopies. Black Hills VA is the only facility in South Dakota offering this new technology to Veterans. Private facilities in the community do not have this technology yet. The VA nationally purchased 115 units nationwide and the Black Hills was one of the sites chosen to use it. GI Genius is a great tool in providing the best possible exams to our Veterans.

GI Genius uses artificial intelligence assisted colonoscopies. Performing AI-assisted colonoscopies takes no additional time. 90% of patients with colon cancer will beat it if it is caught early. Screening assisted with artificial intelligence is another way for patients to stack the odds in their favor of catching precancerous polyps before the disease advances and spreads.

Dakotas Regional Office Director: Shawn Bohn covered in detail the following:

Over 100,000 claims have been submitted for PACT Act Toxic Airborne Exposure. January 1, 2023, VBA is expecting more guidance on processing those claims. Based on the rating inventory they have 667,000 claims currently pending. VBA quality rating is at 96.15%. They are hiring additional staff due to the PACT Act and the increase in claims. Total FTE is at 190 employees with 125 in Sioux Falls, SD, and 65 in Fargo, ND.

- Navy Blue Water in SD – 187 Pending claims, 746 complete, 9.8 million paid out
- NEMR Blue Water – 80 cases still pending – prior denials
- Stressed the difference in the tort case with Camp Lejune claims – be aware.
- Stressed the VR&E options for Veterans
-

South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs Update: Aaron Pollard covered the following:

Secretary Whitlock was unable to attend, and Deputy Director Aaron Pollard briefed

- State Veterans Home – CNAs and Nursing shortage. On site hiring on Friday, November 18th, 2022. Sign on bonus up to \$3200.00 for eligible applicants.
- Claims Office- fully staffed
- 30 bridge dedications for 33 Heroes thus far. 60 Applications with board to meeting in April. 12 Heroes get scheduled
- Mini Townhalls – four (4) this past fall – CITC/PACT Act/ Tricare coverage major concerns
- Healthcare Task Force overview
- 15 new Tribal/CVSOs
- South Dakota State Cemetery
 - 470 burials / 2000 pre burial applications – 30-50/ week
 - Thank you to the Honor Guards who provide services
 - New road is complete to the cemetery
 - Veterans Day – Guardians Dedication – Thanked all that donated
 - December 17th – Wreaths Across America

Veterans Honored Interment: Roger Van Noort covered the following: (Brochure attached)

Roger described the origins of the organization and how it operates. Urns and Caskets made by Veterans for Veterans

On a motion by (DAV) Gene Murphy and seconded by (VFW) Anna Arnold to allow \$1,000.00 (\$500.00 East River and \$500.00 West River) to be donated by the SDVC to VHI. Discussion. Motion carried.

Russ Chavez covered the following: Director of Veterans Affairs South Dakota State University

Mr. Chavez introduced himself, but qualified that he was speaking on behalf of himself and not in his official capacity with the university.

Mr. Chavez is seeking support to refine certain aspects of SDCL 13-55-10. This law is exclusive in its language and Mr. Chavez is wanting to expand eligibility. Mr. Chavez described the necessity of expanding the benefits to all Service Members.

8. ENDOWMENT UPDATE:

Endowment Fund Balance Update -Terry Paulsen: (attached)

9. RECOGNITION OF CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS:

Unveiling of Eagles on Veterans Day – Erin Brown

Ken Teunissen – Heritage Alliance Truck and election in the SD Legislation

Jim Wosje for his work on the DAV Hunts

Jim Wosje, Helen Parr and Dave Van Dine for their work to set up for the meeting

10. UPDATES FROM EACH VSO:

VFW: Anna Arnold

- Thanked all for involvement in the Parkston celebration this past July
- Department has reached 92.01% in membership. Top 7 in the Nation
- Department has moved to the Alliance and encouraged all to visit
- VFW logo has been approved for license plates (\$10 or \$15)
- Legislative Conference – February 5th-6th, 2023
- Plans to also champion Property Tax Exemption
- Encouraged all to join if not a member of the VFW

TAL: Doug Feltman

- Event in Huron to discuss Camp Lejune – February 10th-12th
- November 5th, 2022- Veterans Fair was successful in Sturgis – 50 Vendors/190 Veterans/315 Attendees

DAV: Dan Francis

- November – Giving Back at the Grand Falls Casino
- Legislative handout provided
- Department quarterly bulletin handed out
- HTP (2021-2022) Update given
- 727th Poker Run donated \$47,000.00 to the HTP
- VA CLC Patients - Christmas Gifts welcomed

VVA:

959 – Terry Mayer

- Veterans Day Review – Senator Rounds speech
- Same information provided as September 28th report on September 16th, POW Recognition Day

1054 – Phil Braeger

- 10 schools have been given one hour presentation on Americanism
- \$20,000.00 Gift Cards to be given to needy Veterans. Will be given to CVSOs to hand out as appropriate. Money is generated from Elk Hunt Raffle.

MOPH: Connie Johnson

- Overview of MOPH City, County, Businesses Highways recognized as Purple Heart supporters

PVA: Terry Paulsen

- Recap of the Annual Dueling Pianos – Thanked all for sponsorship of tables
- Pheasant Hunts have wrapped up – Howard and Platte
- Christmas Luncheon – 2nd Thursday in December 2022. All are welcome. Please send RSVP to the PVA.

11. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**Legislative 2023 Discussion:**

The SDVC approved to introduce a resolution to lobby the State of South Dakota to amend South Dakota Codified Law Chapter SDCL 10-4-10 and 10-4-41, to include the service-connected disabilities 70%-90% for the property tax exemption.

The SDVC approved to lobby the South Dakota Legislature during the 2023 session to pass legislation to amend SDCL 33A-1-22 to include the stipulation that counties with Veteran Populations of 1000 to 3999 according to the most recent Annual VA GDX Report have at a minimum one full-time dedicated County Veterans Service Officer; and for counties with greater than 4000 Veterans an additional one full-time dedicated County Veterans Service officer be employed for each additional 4000 Veterans.

The SDVC approved to introduce a resolution to the South Dakota Legislature to research placement of Veterans in community nursing homes with funding from federal, and State governments and Veterans in rural states.

Proposed Future SDVC Meetings:

January 11th, 2023, Pierre, 2:00 pm – 5:00 pm (CST) – TAL

January 11th, 2023, Pierre, 5:30 pm – 7:30 pm (CST) – Legislative Reception

UPDATED - April 19th, 2023, Rapid City, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm (MST)

UPDATED - July 19th, 2023, Sisseton, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm (CST)

Future Legislative Roundtables:

November 16th, 2022, Sioux Falls 12:00 pm – 1:30 pm (CST) – DAV & PVA

November 17th, 2022, Watertown 12:00 pm – 1:30 pm (CST) – VVA & TAL

November 18th, 2022, Pierre 2:00 pm – 3:30 pm (CST) – TAL

November 19th, 2022, Spearfish 10:00 am – 11:30 am (MT) – VFW

12. NEW BUSINESS:

Future Legislative Roundtables:

January 11th, 2023, Pierre 5:30 pm – 7:30 pm (CST)

13. NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING

On a motion by (PVA) Terry Paulsen and seconded by (DAV) Gene Murphy to hold the next meeting on January 11th, 2023, from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. (CST), in Pierre, at The American Legion Post 8, 520 S. Pierre Street, SD. Motion carried.

14. GOOD OF THE ORDER: SDVC Christmas tree decoration on November 22nd, 2022, at the SD Military Heritage Alliance Building at 4:30 p.m. Please join us.

15. CLOSING COMMENTS AND ADJOURNMENT:

With no other business before the council, Vice President Kevin Hempel led the council in the benediction followed by a salute to the colors from President Connie Johnson.

On a motion by (PVA) Terry Mayer and seconded by (VFW) Anna Arnold to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried. The meeting was adjourned at 11:53 a.m.