



## VETERANS RURAL HEALTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE

September 25-26, 2019  
Washington, D.C.  
9:00AM – 5:00PM

### NOTES

#### **Attendees:**

##### **Committee Members Present:**

Dale Gibbs, Chair  
Graham Adams  
Andrew Behrman  
Stephanie Birdwell  
Angeline Bushy  
Francisco Ivarra  
Deanna Lamb  
Michael McLaughlin  
Brenda Moore  
Keith Mueller  
Joe Parsetich  
Lonnie Wangen

Kelly Lora Lewis  
Nancy Maher  
Valerie Mattison Brown  
Michelle Mengeling  
William Morales  
Sarah Ono  
Sheila Robinson  
Sergio Romero  
Aimee Sanders  
LaTonya Small  
Christine Stuppy  
Christopher Syrek  
Anu Torgal  
Carolyn Turvey  
Matt Vincenti  
Vince Watts  
Alvin Williams

##### **Ex-Officio Members Present:**

Gary Bojes, U.S. Department of  
Agriculture (USDA) - *alternate*  
Tom Morris, Health Resources and  
Services Administration (HRSA)  
Ben Smith, Indian Health Service (IHS)

##### **Consultants Present:**

Vicki Brienza  
Casey Hutchison  
Stephen Miles  
Emily Oehler  
Jasmine Williams

##### **Department of Veterans Affairs Staff Present:**

Thomas Klobucar, Designated Federal  
Officer  
Anthony Achampong, Alternate  
Designated Federal Officer  
Judy Bowie, Committee Manager  
Byron Bair  
Mary Fields  
Janice Garland  
Maggie Heimann  
Rich Huang  
Karyn Johnstone

##### **Public Attendees:**

Michelle Amante, Partnership for Public  
Service  
Cicely Burrows-McElwain, U.S.  
Department of Health and Human  
Services  
Janine Austin Clayton, National  
Institutes of Health

Rachael Colden  
Sophia Friedl, Senate Veterans Affairs  
Committee (SVAC)  
Angela Grubbs  
Jessica Hennelly  
Albert Hu, USDA  
Michele Johnson  
Quaneca Little  
Kristi Martinsen, HRSA

Sabrina Matoff-Stepp, HRSA  
Kate McGraw, Defense Health Agency  
Alea Nadeem, Air Force  
Shawna Rust, SVAC  
Allison Schulhof, AbleVets  
Ariana Simone, Deloitte  
Charmaine Smith

### **Meeting Objectives**

1. VRHAC will gain increased understanding of VA's health care programs for enrolled women Veterans.
2. VRHAC will gain increased understanding of the Office of Rural Health's fiscal year 2020 initiatives.
3. VRHAC will discuss spring 2020 committee meeting in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

**Wednesday, September 25, 2019**

**Welcome, Introductions and Meeting Overview**

*Dale Gibbs, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee*

- The Chair convened the meeting, conducted introductions, and reviewed the agenda

**Brief: Senate Veterans Affairs Committee Update**

*Sophie Friedl, Professional Staff Member, Senate Veterans Affairs Committee*

- Listed priorities including timely rollout of Caregivers Program technology, market assessments, Blue Water Navy Act, and John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act
- Answered questions on Deborah Sampson Act and Senate priorities

**Presentation: VA Progress and Priorities**

*Christopher Syrek, Deputy Chief of Staff, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*

- Thanked the Committee and the Advisory Committee Management Office on behalf of the Secretary for their work
- Shared the Secretary's priorities and noted key statistics and initiatives on telehealth and women Veterans' health
- Answered questions on telehealth, Blue Water Navy Act, priorities for women Veterans' health, future vulnerabilities for VA, provider onboarding, physician education, MISSION Act provider network, and broadband network expansion
- Presented certificates to departing Committee Chair and Chair-Elect

**Brief: Advisory Committee Management Office Update**

*LaTonya Small, Program Specialist, Advisory Committee Management Office, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*

- Thanked the Committee and the Chair for their service to rural Veterans

**Brief: Partnership for Public Service**

*Michelle Amante, Director of Federal Workforce Programs, Partnership for Public Service*

- Shared the Partnership's history, mission, and key projects
- Answered questions on the scope of the Partnership's work, their work's effect in the field, funding, recruitment assistance programs, the Best Places to Work in the Federal Government report, federal employment of young professionals, rural-related programs, and service offerings

### **Roundtable: Veterans Health Administration Office of Policy and Planning**

*Valerie Mattison Brown, Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Policy and Planning, Veterans Health Administration (VHA), U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*

- Provided overview of the Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Policy and Planning's work, including support of VHA's priorities
- Shared strategies and performance measures for reaching strategic goals
- Shared VHA's long-range planning and Ten Lanes of Effort, which assist in the transition to an integrated high reliability organization

*Christine Stuppy, Executive Director, Strategic Planning and Analysis, Office of Policy and Planning, Veterans Health Administration, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*

- Linked VHA market assessments to modernization efforts
- Clarified legislative foundation, goals, and guiding principles for market assessments and Veteran-focused capital realignment
- Explained the scope of effort, history, and current state of the assessments

*Anu Torgal, Program Analyst, Enrollment and Forecasting, Office of Policy and Planning, Veterans Health Administration, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*

- Explained the VA Enrollee Health Care Projection Model (EHCPM), which uses 20 years of data to project enrollee demographics, health care needs, VA care usage, and expenditures
- Shared future projections for Veterans, enrollees, and patients, noting an expected greater proportion of women over time

Panelists answered questions on enrollee age distributions by gender, care access by priority group, VA-Department of Defense (DoD) collaboration, population growth on the coasts, aging Veterans and Medicare eligibility, rural health questions on market assessments, enrollee projection data availability, American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) Veterans, tribal facility site visits for market assessments, capital and non-capital findings in the market assessments, rural migration pattern data, and VA's role in communities

### **Presentation: Annual Ethics Training**

- Completed required ethics training

### **Presentation: Office of Rural Health 2020-2025 Strategic Plan**

*Emily Oehler, Director, Grant Thornton*

- Discussed the planning process and ORH's engagement over the past two years with five federal agencies and 14 program offices, along with more than 15 private sector organizations (e.g., recruiting firms, health providers, associations, and academia) to obtain input on its fiscal year 2020-2025 strategic plan
- Shared that the new plan will be available on ORH's public facing website in October 2019

**Presentation: Access to Care and MISSION Act**

*Mary Fields, Director of Field Support, Office of Veterans Access to Care (OVAC), U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*

- Detailed OVAC initiatives related to rural, including the Increasing Capacity, Efficiency, and Productivity (ICEP) Initiative, Telehealth Initiative, MISSION Act 401 (Medically Underserved), and MISSION Act 507 (Medical Scribes)
- Answered questions on rural underserved facilities, telehealth consults, Montana care availability, and nursing licensure

**Presentation: Office of Rural Health Update and Staff Introductions**

*Thomas Klobucar, Executive Director, Office of Rural Health, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*

- Gave overview of rural demographic data, Veterans Rural Health Resource Centers (VRHRC), Rural Promising Practices, standup of Clinical Resource Hubs, Enterprise-Wide Initiatives, ORH budget, enrolled rural women Veteran demographics, and ORH's external partnerships
- Shared success stories from the Congressionally-mandated VA Farming and Recovery Mental Health Services (FARMS) program
- Welcomed new ORH Deputy Director Sheila Robinson and new VRHAC Chair Deanna Lamb
- Invited Ex Officio representatives in attendance to provide updates:
  - IHS ex officio representative gave update on the VA-IHS Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) revisions and performance metrics
  - HRSA ex officio representative gave update on HRSA rural health grants and HHS Rural Task Force
- Answered questions on COIN focus and funding, Veterans Service Organization (VSO) Wellness Centers, and VISN Rural Consultants

**Discussion: Recap Day 1**

*Emily Oehler, Director, Grant Thornton*

- Committee reviewed highlights, concerns, and potential recommendation topics gleaned from the day's presentations

**Thursday, September 26, 2019**

**Welcome**

*Dale Gibbs, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee*

- The Chair reconvened the meeting and reviewed the agenda for the day.

**Roundtable: Women Veterans' Health and Well-Being Programs**

*Janine Austin Clayton, Associate Director for Research on Women's Health and Director of the Office of Research on Women's Health, National Institutes of Health (NIH)*

- Reviewed NIH's women-focused strategic goals
- Emphasized a key policy change: Investigators who conduct applicable phase III clinical trials must report analysis of their data by sex/gender and race/ethnicity on ClinicalTrials.gov

*Cicely Burrows-McElwain, Military and Veterans Affairs Liaison, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*

- Introduced the Service Members, Veterans, and their Families Technical Assistance (SMVF TA) Center and associated online resources, and called for collaboration
- Shared the VA/SAMHSA Mayor's and Governor's Challenge Efforts, which help communities understand how to think about the Veteran population
- Highlighted how SAMHSA uses granting to encourage communities to address Veterans' needs

*Major Alea Nadeem, Air Force Barrier Analysis Group, Women's Initiative Team Lead, U.S. Department of Air Force Headquarters Air Force*

- Shared cooperation between the Air Force and VA on the Women's Health Transition Training pilot, which addresses transitioning women service members' lack of awareness of VA services
- Noted that women Veterans often feel invisible, and military sexual trauma creates additional challenges
- Suggested that ORH could collaborate on a live, virtual classroom version of the training to reach rural service members

*Kate McGraw, Deputy Division Chief, Psychological Health Center of Excellence, Defense Health Agency (DHA)*

- Introduced the VA/DoD Women's Health Work Group, the DoD Women's Mental Health Work Group, and the DHA's Psychological Health Center of Excellence
- Shared two key studies on geographically remote service members and highlighted the "In Transition" program which supports high-risk care transition
- Noted barriers to supporting women Veterans' health

*Sabrina Matoff-Stepp, Director, Office of Women's Health, Health Resources and Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*

- Shared data on increase in Veterans served at HRSA's Bureau of Primary Health Care health centers since 2008
- Introduced the new Rural Maternity and Obstetric Management Strategies (RMOMS) Pilot Program, which improves access to and continuity of maternal obstetrics care in rural communities
- Outlined the HRSA Strategy to Address Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

*Aimee Sanders, Physician Educator, Women's Health Education, Women's Health Service, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*

- Detailed key women Veterans' health programs, which cover training, care coordination, culture change, and more
- Emphasized the challenges presented by demographics, geography, training, care coordination, suicide, and military sexual trauma
- Highlighted opportunities to collaborate

*Michelle Mengeling, Research Investigator, Iowa Veterans Affairs Medical Center, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*

- Shared key findings of published research on rural women Veterans, highlighting their reliance on VA care compared to urban counterparts, risk of attrition, and rates of military sexual assault experience
- Noted challenges and opportunities in conducting rural women Veterans' health research

### **Roundtable: Women Veterans' Health and Well-Being Programs; Part II**

- *Aimee Sanders, Physician Educator, Women's Health Education, Women's Health Service, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*
- *Michelle Mengeling, Research Investigator, Iowa Veterans Affairs Medical Center*
- *Kate McGraw, Deputy Division Chief, Defense Health Agency's Psychological Health Center of Excellence*
- *Janine Austin Clayton, Associate Director for Research on Women's Health and Director of the Office of Research on Women's Health, National Institutes of Health*
- *Sabrina Matoff-Stepp, Director, Office of Women's Health, Health Resources and Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*
- *Cicely Burrows-McElwain, Military and Veterans Affairs Liaison, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*
- *Major Alea Nadeem, Air Force Barrier Analysis Group, Women's Initiative Team Lead, U.S. Department of Air Force Headquarters Air Force*
  - Participants answered questions on the NIH annual report, safe houses for IPV, LGBT health research, data collection from community partners, data sovereignty for AI/AN research, women Veterans of color, suicide rates for women Veterans,



screening for Veteran status, group mental health therapy, peer support for suicide prevention, community provider education, women's health primary care providers in VA, sexual harassment of women and lack of childcare services at VA facilities, Gulf War illnesses' effect on women, military sexual trauma, holistic and trauma-informed approaches to health care, dependent Veterans, opioid use by women Veterans, key health issues for women Veterans, barriers to women receiving care, vulnerable populations within women Veterans, and potential recommendations to the Secretary

### **Panel: Women Veterans' Health Perspectives**

- *SFC Michele Johnson; Army and Air Force; Human Resources Sergeant and Equal Opportunity Advisor*
- *SGT Quanece V. Little; Army / Executive Assistant to the Secretary of the Army*
- *COL Angela Grubbs; Retired Air Force; Medical Service Corps and Air Force Surgeon General*
- *MSGT Charmaine Smith; Air Force; Reserve; Aviation Resource Management*
- *CPT Jessica Hennelly; Army; Field Artillery and Human Resources Officer*
- *LT Rachael Colden; Navy; Activated Reservist; Family Nurse Practitioner*
  - Shared military background and health care usage
  - Noted key concerns with transitioning and seeking VA care, focusing on EHR transferability, stigma around mental health, and reluctance to take time away from work for appointments
  - Discussed the health issues that affect their women colleagues and compared the health care approaches of their women and men colleagues, particularly women's underreporting of health issues due to cultural pressures to be strong
  - Shared positive stories they have heard about VA
  - Made recommendations for how VA could help ease their transition
  - Participants answered questions on eating and sleep disorders, moving to rural areas, health issues directly attributable to active duty, and personal experiences

### **Presentation: ORH-Funded Research and Innovations**

*Michelle Mengeling, Research Investigator, ORH VRHRC Iowa City*

- Announced new key staff at ORH VRHRC Iowa City
- Shared women-centered research projects on suicide, treatment preferences, and proactive care conversations

*Matt Vincenti, Operations Director, ORH VRHRC White River Junction*

- Introduced new Clinical Director Vince Watts
- Explained philosophy of collecting information on rural health disparities and challenges with the goal of designing targeted solutions
- Clarified the ORH VRHRC research domains
- Shared research project comparing VA and community care on rurality, wait times for referrals, and utilization of specialty care



- Answered questions on wait time research and care coordination

*Sarah Ono, Operations Director, ORH VRHRC Portland*

- Introduced new ORH VRHRC Portland and key staff, including Clinical Director Travis Lovejoy
- Shared newest data on women Veteran suicide
- Discussed how ORH VRHRC Portland will address ORH research portfolio topical gaps, and highlighted areas of expertise
- Emphasized that a framework of race, class, and gender underscores ORH VRHRC Portland's work

*Sergio Romero, Operations Director, ORH VRHRC Gainesville*

- Introduced ORH VRHRC Gainesville and key staff
- Shared fiscal year 2020 portfolio, which focuses on supporting independent living for rural Veterans and addressing rural workforce issues

*Byron Bair, Clinical Director, ORH VRHRC Salt Lake City*

- Introduced ORH VRHRC Salt Lake City focus areas for fiscal year 2020 and research philosophy
- Shared key projects on access to telemental health services for rural AI/AN Veterans and mentorship pathways for the future generation of rural health care workers

**Discussion: Meeting Insights**

*Emily Oehler, Director, Grant Thornton*

- Committee reviewed highlights, concerns, and potential recommendation topics from the day's presentations

**Discussion: 2020 Site Visit and Recommendation Development**

*Emily Oehler, Director, Grant Thornton*

- Committee discussed components for the spring site visit and meeting dates for fiscal year 2020

**Evaluation**

*Emily Oehler, Director, Grant Thornton*

- Obtained input on the meeting

**Public Comment Period**

*Dale Gibbs, Chair, VRHAC*

*Deanna Lamb, Chair-Elect, VRHAC*

- No public comments