



VETERANS RURAL HEALTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE

September 20-22, 2021
Zoom virtual meeting
11 AM – 2:30 PM (EST), each day

NOTES

Attendees:

Committee Members Present:

Deanna Lamb, Chair
Joe Parsetich
Angeline Bushy
Marcus Cox
Vanessa Meade
Graham Adams
Keith Mueller
Katherine Miller
Michael Mclaughlin
Lonnie Wangen
Pavithra Ellison
Stephanie Birdwell
Andrew Behrman
Vanessa Meade

Ex-Officio Members Present:

Ben Smith
Kristi Martinsen
Kellie Kubena

Department of Veterans Affairs Staff Present:

Thomas Klobucar, DFO
Judy Bowie, Committee Manager
Anthony Achampong, Alternate DFO
Janice Garland, Alternate DFO
Sheila Robinson
Samantha Solimeo
Rich Huang
Kelsea LeBeau
Carolyn Turvey
Phil Welch
Keith Myers
Bret Hicken

Sergio Romero
Travis Lovejoy
Nancy Dailey
Byron Bair
Kelly Lora Lewis
Clay Ward
Sarah Ono
Matt Vincenti
Karyn Johnstone
Amy O'Shea
Vince Watts
Louise Arnheim
Carolyn Clancy
Benjamin Miller
Kevin Galpin
Treva Lutes
LaTonya Small
Zavian Cooper
Jeff Moragne
Peter Kaboli
Kristin Pettey
Dan Palmeri
Ryan Sharpe

Consultants Present:

Elizabeth Schwartz
Jasmine Williams
Scott Bledsoe
Robert Derby

Public Attendees:

Robin Hutcheson, U.S. Department of Transportation
Kathryn de Wit, The Pew Charitable Trusts

Public Attendees (continued):

Laurel Leverrier, U.S. Department of
Agriculture
Jesse Jachman, Federal
Communications Commission
Abby Roubal
Fred Wagar, Nevada Department of
Veterans Services
Christopher Fletcher, American Legion
Rene Campos, Military Officers
Association of America (MOAA)

Theresa Wrzesinski
Andrew Herrin
Anne Davis
Maria Llorente
Gloria Romanelli
Ade Oguntala
Kelsea LeBeau
Mary Sell
Ariana Shahnazi
Chris Benham

Meeting Objectives

1. VRHAC will gain increased understanding of transportation and broadband infrastructure challenges impeding rural Veterans' access to health care.
2. VRHAC will gain increased understanding of efforts to enhance transportation and broadband infrastructure to support rural Veterans' access to health care.
3. VRHAC will develop infrastructure-centric recommendations for the VA Secretary.

Monday, September 20, 2021

Welcome, Introductions and Meeting Overview

Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee

- Chair convened meeting, introduced new Committee members, and reviewed agenda.

Webinar Tools & Instructions

Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications

- Reviewed Zoom functions, meeting and facilitation protocols.

2021 Fall Meeting Focus: Office of Rural Health Observations on Transportation Resources and Broadband Infrastructure

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

- Provided background information on rural health care challenges and Office of Rural Health structure and program work.
- Highlighted rural transportation and broadband challenges affecting rural Veterans' access to care.

Presentation: Department of Veteran Affairs FY2022 Outlook

Dr. Carolyn Clancy, Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Discovery, Education, and Affiliate Networks, Veterans Health Administration

- Provided overview of VA's Fourth Mission and coronavirus response including education and training, testing, vaccine research and distribution, telehealth expansion, and Veteran care.
- Highlighted VA health equity priorities including minority Veteran outreach and workforce recruitment and retention.
- Discussed VA rural health infrastructure and access efforts in the areas of workforce recruitment and retention, telehealth, and community care.

Presentation: Overview of VHA Veterans' Transportation Programs

Ben Williams, Director, Veterans Transportation Program, Veterans Health Administration

- Provided overview of Veteran Transportation Service funding and service sites. Highlighted program expansion over the past few years.
- Discussed existing challenges with transportation access—highlighted need to modify existing regulations, ensure transportation costs are covered, and establish emergency (ambulance) transport services through VTS.
- Discussed solutions including Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between ORH and VTP, expansion of Highly Rural Transportation Grant (HRTG) authority, and collaboration with VA medical centers.

- Discussed Beneficiary Travel program including eligibility, program parameters, and reimbursement.
- Answered questions about collaboration with Disabled American Veterans (DAV), future grant funding and timelines, beneficiary support for dependents, and progress towards VAMC collaboration.

Presentation: Overview of National Rural Transportation Initiatives

Robin Hutcheson, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Safety, Office of Transportation Policy, U.S. Department of Transportation

- Provided overview of rural transportation infrastructure challenges in areas of safety, infrastructure condition, and usage.
- Highlighted major rural infrastructure challenges—bridge conditions, heavy freight movement, high cost and low reliability.
- Discussed DOT “ROUTES” initiative and rural strategy to improve transportation infrastructure in rural communities to include enhancing livability and mobility, resources for electric vehicle infrastructure in rural communities, and improving safety.
- Answered questions about current grant programs and improving EMS response on rural roadways.

Advisory Committee Transition of Outgoing Members

Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee

- Recognized three outgoing VRHAC members and thanked them for their contributions.

Wrap Up & Close

Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee

Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications

- Committee reviewed highlights, concerns and outstanding questions regarding the day’s presentations.

Tuesday, September 21, 2021**Welcome, Introductions and Meeting Overview**

Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee

- Chair reconvened meeting and reviewed agenda.

Webinar Tools & Instructions

Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications

- Reviewed Zoom functions, meeting and facilitation protocols.

Presentation: VA Telehealth and the Digital Divide

Kevin Galpin, Executive Director, Telehealth, Office of Connected Care, Veterans Health Administration

- Provided overview of VHA Office of Connected Care functions and key programs.
- Discussed three types of VA telehealth, where they occur, and how they're implemented; provided key telehealth impact data.
- Highlighted major challenges and current programs to overcome telehealth access barriers related to the digital divide and clinical resource sharing.
- Answered questions about use of TVs for telehealth, provider training in telehealth adoption, demographic breakdown of telehealth usage, and potential user security concerns.

Presentation: Public/Private Partnerships to Enhance Rural Broadband

Kathryn de Wit, Project Director, Broadband Access Initiative, The Pew Charitable Trusts

- Provided overview of broadband basics—how it's defined and regulated.
- Discussed the digital divide in areas of policy, expertise/data, funding, financial incentives, and inadequate infrastructure.
- Highlighted rural broadband access challenges related to demographics, narrow margins for return on investment (ROI), availability of funding, competition, and state and local policy.
- Discussed best practices for private/public partnerships; provided examples of successful broadband partnerships.
- Answered questions about potential use of satellite technology for broadband deployment, how to get involved at the community and state level, and how to identify needs of different service populations.

Presentation: Federal Funding for the Nation's Rural Utilities

Laurel Leverrier, Assistant Administrator, Telecommunications Program, Rural Development Rural Utilities Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture

- Provided overview of different USDA telecommunications programs that support broadband construction and expansion in rural communities.
- Highlighted USDA funding history for broadband, distance learning, and telemedicine projects that serve rural residents.
- Discussed interagency coordination efforts on broadband expansion.
- Discussed recent challenges and solutions to address construction project backlog.
- Answered questions about potential grant opportunities, federal stakeholder coordination, and the American Broadband Initiative (ABI).

Presentation: Regulatory Issues Affecting Rural Broadband Access

Jesse Jachman, Assistant Division Chief, Telecommunications Access Policy Division, Wireline Competition Bureau, Federal Communications Commission

- Provided overview of Universal Service Fund—detailed efforts of high-cost program to serve high-cost areas (e.g., rural areas). Discussed COVID-19 and emergency subsidy programs.
- Detailed obligations and enforcement mechanisms that telecommunications companies are bound to when participating in high-cost program.
- Discussed major challenges and how FCC is addressing them in areas of data collection, interagency coordination, increasing demand, balancing program allocations, and affordability.
- Answered questions about Lifeline Program, reimbursement process for telecommunications companies, and how subsidy programs are promoted to the public.

Wrap Up & Close

Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee

Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications

- Committee reviewed highlights, concerns and outstanding questions regarding the day's presentations.

Wednesday, September 22, 2021**Welcome, Introductions and Meeting Overview**

Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee

- Chair reconvened meeting and reviewed agenda.
- Played VA Secretary video message to Committee members.

Webinar Tools & Instructions

Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications

- Reviewed Zoom functions, meeting and facilitation protocols.

Introduction to Afternoon Facilitated Discussions

Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee

- Provided overview of facilitated discussion process to generate recommendations to VA Secretary.

Facilitated Discussions: Methodology and Application

Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications

- Explained brainstorm methodology tools and process for facilitated discussion.

Facilitated Discussion, Part 1 (“Idea Generation” and “Focus” Tools)

Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications

- Committee members engaged in rapid idea generation around the topics of broadband and transportation.
- Committee used focus tool to expand upon ideas and generate potential solutions to problems raised.

Facilitated Discussion, Part 2 (“Harvest” and “Treatment” Tools)

Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications

- Committee used harvest tool to develop SMART goals around suggested solutions from previous session.
- Committee used treatment tool to identify potential barriers or challenges to goals developed.

Facilitated Discussion, Part 3 (Qualifying Recommendations)

Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications

- Committee condensed brainstormed goals into a list of actionable recommendations.
- Committee was briefed on multi-voting process to identify top 2-3 recommendations for the VA Secretary’s consideration. Committee agreed to return voting forms within 10 business days of meeting completion.

Wrap Up & Close

- Chair thanked Committee members for their work and adjourned meeting.

Public Comment Period

Anthony Achampong, Alternate Designated Federal Officer, Office of Rural Health

Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee

- No public comments.