ND Cares Coalition Meeting Minutes

December 9, 2021

Connie opened the meeting with a roll call of coalition members. There were 18 people on the call.

**Presentation:** Trisha Chadduck from the Fargo VA Caregiver Program presented information on Caregiver Stress Trends and Resources. Trisha began with some statistics about caregivers caring for veterans with PTSD and compared them to those caring for veterans without PTDS. The former were higher in incidents of suicidal ideation, being threatened, receiving mental health treatments and major depressive disorder. To address these issues Trisha described the Dept. of Veteran Affairs’ two caregiver programs: the Program of General Caregiver Support Services (PGCSS) and the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC). The PGCSS is for veterans of all service eras even if they have no service connected disability. The program offers resources, education and support. The PCAFC (aka: the Stipend program) is for caregivers of veterans with a service connected disability rating of 70% or more and who need personal care services, and who served on or before 9/11/01 or, on or before 5/7/75. This program offers additional benefits for caregivers. Trisha also made suggestions are where to find resources outside the VA system.

**Coalition Member Updates**

**Protection and Advocacy (P&A):** Pam Mack reported that P&A is looking at veterans and individuals with disabilities that are having challenges with the interface in the justice system. And so to address that they have updated their individual justice planning process to ensure their service delivery systems can recognize the need provide that comprehensive wrap around support to prevent involvement in the justice systems. They are working with law enforcement and judicial systems across the state to make improvements. There will be upcoming trainings and new resources on their website soon.

**U.S. Dept. of Labor:** Marlys Morgenstern reviewed what Veterans Employment and Training Services (VETS) is and explained her roll. The department sponsors two grant programs: the Jobs for Veterans State Grant that is administered by North Dakota Job Service and the other Homeless Veterans Reintegration grant, for which they just completed their first year. Marlys suggested that the person who runs that grant could possibly update the Coalition about the grant in the future. Marlys herself, assists veterans who have a service connected problems with their current employer and works toward a resolution. Marlys offered to provide USERA training to HR departments of coalition members if requested.

**Fargo VA Healthcare System:** Dr. Weintraub reported that Covid is flaring in areas in Nebraska, Iowa and Minnesota, however cases in North Dakota are relatively steady or on a small decline in past two weeks. But like other facilities and others in the private sector, the VA still experiences difficulty staffing, even with recruitment incentives. Even so, they have not cut back services. Travel and face to face outreach is still limited due to Covid.

**ND Dept. of Health:** Joyal Meyer reported that the Suicide Prevention Coalition will host their annual conference February 16 in Bismarck. The conference will be both in-person and virtual. Kodi Pinks, a state epidemiologist will provide updated suicide data. Joyal is still working on keynote presenter and will provide an update once plans are more concrete.

**Senator Devers:** Sen. Devers reported that during the last legislative session they put significant toward behavioral health. $2M was provided for up to two non-IMD facilities in western North Dakota to provide addiction services, but that number was recently bumped to $5M for up to four underserved areas. North Dakota does not currently have a psychiatrist west of Highway 83. These is also more money available for peer to peer support for those individuals in the Free Through Recovery involving the corrections system and through Community Behavioral Health for those at risk. During the regular session they passed a bill to set up or prioritize a justice system for veterans but did provide funding.

**Military Outreach:** Kelli Weiand reported that the Minot stand down occurred and the National Guard hosted Covid vaccine booster events at several guard facilities. Kelli set up FirstLink resource training for the Devils Lake Homeless Coalition. Kelli also reported that Nikki Frohlich will not be on the call because she is helping with the Veterans Home/National Guard Christmas party in Lisbon, but wanted to remind that we have stocking stuffers for kids in all our Armory locations in Fargo Grand Forks Devils Lake Minot and Bismarck. Lastly Kelli reported that LTC Flemmer (who participates in Executive Committee meetings) will leave his position at the end of December to take another job.

**Co-Chair:** Cindy Whitesell reported that the Minot Military Affairs Community is emphasizing the “adopt and Airman” program where Airman integrate with families, get to know people, do things that are of interest to them like learn a snowmobile fish hunt and be invited to family holiday gatherings. Close to 100 Airman have been matched to families so far.

**VA:** Katie Fitzsimmons – Katie added that the Suicide Prevention conference will be at the BSC Career Academy.

**VA Community Engagements and Partnerships:** Sarah Kemp-Tabbut reported that she is currently working on a pilot project with three local community care hospitals on streamlining the process for discharging veterans from inpatient mental health for behavioral and substitutes issues to the VA. The polite will run from December to February. The VA Suicide Prevention Program has seen a slight uptick in referrals from the veterans crisis line. The veterans crisis line is there 24/7 and can be used by both veterans and friends and family members. Not every veteran who calls is in crisis or gets a referral to us and but regardless we are seeing an uptick and not necessarily sure why. In 2022 the Veterans Crisis line from switch from 1-800-273-8255 to 988. The will be a huge wave of advertising that will accompany the switch. They anticipate a 150% increase in referrals.

**Military to VA program:** Summer Hanson reported every month they are averaging 75 new post 911 veterans that they are reaching out to when assessing and working with, if they have psychosocial needs. They are also working on a project with the veterans’ benefits administration on a list of veterans working on service connection disability claims who are not yet engaged with their VA health care benefits. The project is doing phone and video outreach to them and encouraging them to engage with their health care.

**VBA Regional Office:** Paula Heitmann reported that the VBA continues to process. The additional presumptive conditions for respiratory conditions to any service in the Gulf War, which includes Afghanistan, Iraq, a huge host of countries for those respiratory conditions as well as the additional Agent Orange and that has really increased the pending claim backlog. They are trying to increase staffing in Fargo up to 20%. She also reported that they will being doing outreach starting in December to military sexual trauma victims, who have claims pending, to make sure they don’t fall through the cracks.

**ND Behavioral Health Division:** Tami Conrad filled in for Pam Sagness and told the Coalition about upcoming monthly grief trainings with trainer Monica McConkey. The trainings will also involve a networking period. Behavioral Health has trained 100 peer support specialists this year for a total of 600 trained in the state. Over 600 people attended the Child and Family Services Conference in Bismarck for which they had great feedback. Behavioral Health also awarded six suicide prevention grants this year and the $5M in funding for addiction programing for residential facilities is available to apply for now.

**Chairman:** Connie reported that the new Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army has been appointed, Shelly Sizer, and explained the duties of the CASA. Shelly will take over as chair of the coalition as soon as the governor appoints her. Michelle added that she contacted the governor’s office to start the appointment process.

**ND Cares Administrative Report**

Michelle Panos reported that the communities of Columbus and Jamestown are now ND Cares Partner Communities. Kelli Weiand and Michelle and MAJ Chad Worrel presented Columbus with their road signs and the presentation for Jamestown is set for Jan. 3rd.

Michelle then gave an overview of the ND Cares budget where only about 7% of the budget has been executed thus far. For donations the Woodward Foundation is asking for information on the number of veterans served by our coalition. That number is difficult to quantify, but if any of coalition members is inclined to offer the information she will pass it along to the Foundation.

For the strategic plan update Michelle reported that the Steve Anderson Spots are running in TV and radio with good response. So far, Steve completed 35 speaking engagements where an average of 10 people told him they saw or heard a spot. For military culture training Michelle reported that Nikki Frohlich held two trainings with the most recent one at the tribal College in Newtown. She and Sarah Kemp-Tabbut of the VA are talking preliminarily about collaborating to offer military culture training through the VA to providers. Michelle then discussed the improved newsletter and offered to include relevant information from Coalition members as needed. The newsletter will go to ND Cares Communities and Business. The next issue will be sometime this winter. The FirstLink data update is also complete with the transfer of 1348 new entries.  
  
Michelle also reported that on the Tricare issue the working group is at a standstill because Tricare has not responded to our meeting requests. MAJ Sheldon has offered to contact staff at the AG’s office who represent relevant licensing boards and invite them to a meeting so the working group can explain the problem and receive advice and support. COL Pauling is retiring and COL Lien will take over as head of the working group. Connie suggested determining if it would be appropriate to voice concerns about Tricare to the Secretary of the Army through David, who is Army Reserve Ambassador or Shelly, who is the Civilian Aid.

Events

Events were discussed as listed in the agenda and Michelle corrected that dates on the ACOVA meeting to Feb 10-11. Sarah from the VA added Vision West will host a behavior health conference in Watford City April 26-27. Michelle mentioned that she plans to have a table at this event and offered military culture training as a topic if one of their other speakers drops out. Sarah said that she plans to be a speaker and possible present SAVE training but is thinking that it could be a combination of SAVE and military culture training.

Next Meetings

The next Coalition meeting will be on Feb. 3 and the next Executive Committee meeting is January 12.

Closing

Connie ended the meeting at approximately 3:00 pm.