**ND Cares Coalition Meeting Minutes**

**August 4, 2022**

Michelle Panos opened the meeting for Co-Chair Cindy Whitesell. There were 18 people on the call.

**Coalition Member Updates**

VBA, Fargo – Paula Heitmann stated that the VA is anticipating passing of the PACT act, which will be a lot more presumptive disabilities for veterans. They also anticipate hiring up additional staff at the Fargo, VA, Regional Office. So that's kind of what we're focusing on at the current time. The VBA and VHA are both still reaching out to veterans to encourage them to take advantage of benefits and healthcare. They are reaching out to veterans as soon as 30, 60 and 90 days after deployment.

Military OneSource – Cassie Roness talked about some events she attended such as the backpacks for kids event at Minot AFB. It was very well attended, and she had the opportunity to talk to several people about services like PCs, moves and employment in new locations.

VA, Fargo – Summer Hanson stated that the VA is reaching out to Post 911 veterans at about 100 per month, while anywhere between 90 and 100 veterans on ongoing case management. Her department is participating in more Yellow Ribbon Events around ND and MN since COVID restrictions were eased.

VA, Fargo – Stuart Eidenschink filled in for Dr. Weintraub and reported that with the passage of the PACT act it will allow for the hiring of more mental health staff because more veterans will be entitled to that care. They are looking to hire mental health professionals of a variety of licensures however there are challenges attracting and recruiting and incentivizing people to join the VA. Space is also an issue. Some of their mental health staff are teleworking until certain CBOCs are expanded. Lastly, Stuart mentioned that the VA is doing everything they can to expedite the building of the Fisher House and he thanked Commissioner Wangen for all his efforts.

Protection & Advocacy – Pam Mack explained that they are currently in a public comment period gathering information from people with disabilities, family members, providers, folks such as yourselves and really wanting to make sure that we gain input so we can build our goals and objectives for the coming year that I'll start October 1st. If you have an interest in sharing information with us, please go to our website to complete a survey. P&A is also keeping up on interim legislative bill drafts and offering input where necessary. One of the issues they are following is the fact that the 1959 program is not attracting as many provider as anticipated and looking to the department to identify how they could assist with building that infrastructure. They were successful in lowering the WHODA score from 50 down to 25 for eligibility for the 1959 program which means that more service-Connected veterans are now eligible for services. The lowering of the WHODA score also applied to the Human Service Centers.

Survivor Outreach Services – Sara Blazek reported that the Bridges for the Fallen contacted her about dedicated bridges in ND to a fallen service member or dedicated to those with “the hidden wounds” of war. We’ve identified the main exit off the highway into Jamestown as the bridge (281 North and South) and Rep. Bernie Satrom of Jamestown will be the legislative sponsor. The DOT needs to be brought into the conversation and agree the bridge in an appropriate one. Lonnie stated that we could expand the legislation to include more bridges for more people if necessary. Lastly Sara reported that the prior weekend was Remembrance Weekend in Bismarck, were families who’ve lost a military loved-one can meet in person and make positive connections and attend seminars and trainings. There will also be a remembrance prayer service at the GWT memorial for the families on 9-11.

NDARNG, R3SP – Amy Ruff reported that the Commanders Ready and Resilience Council has been very busy. The Spiritual Health Working group is getting ready to survey the force to ascertain their spiritual readiness. We have very little data on the subject. The psychological health working group has several initiatives. One of them is the National Guard is now a licensed 16-hour DUI provider as well as minor in possession or slash consumption provider with the division. Another is the Fit to Fight campaign that focuses on substance abuse prevention and staying within those low-risk guidelines for alcohol consumption as well as creating some strong boundaries to lower chances at sexual assault, slash sexual harassment incidences.

ND Cares Co-Chair – Cindy Whitesell talked about the ND Cares presentation in Williston to Vision West and the two booth she and Kelli Weiand set up at the State Fair. One booth is at the free military lunch sponsored be the Beef Council and the other is a booth in another area with other community agencies. During the lunch they go from table to table to visit with service member to make sure they have information about services and contact information. Next up will be a presentation in Watford City to the McKenzie County and there is a veterans’ resource event coming up in Stanley.

Military Outreach (North) – Kelli Weiand reported that it’s been a busy summer. Ahead are veterans resource events in Newtown and Washburn. She and Cindy will get in touch with the person who took over the community support duties at Minot since John Jeziorske left.

Military Outreach (South) – Nikki Frohlich reported that she is mainly working on the upcoming Military Standdown August 25 at the Amvets in Bismarck. There is also a military appreciation event at Sleepy Hollow in Bismarck where she will set up an information booth. Brats for the Brave will be held September 7th at the Kirkwood Mall in Bismarck and is sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce. It’s in conjunction with Vitalant’s Battle of the Badges blood drive. There are also a few Yellow Ribbon events coming up that she usually attends. Lastly, she stated that the ND Cares Dickinson Sign Presentation went well and was also attended by Spc. John Fettig’s sister. Fettig was the first North Dakota National Guard member killed in the Global War on Terrorism.

VA Community Outreach and Engagement – Sarah Kemp-Tabbut stated September is Suicide Prevention month and there will be prevention event on the 7th in Hankinson ND. The town lost a young man by suicide about a year ago but there is still quite an outpouring of support for the suicide prevention program upon his behalf so we're bringing that back to community in the form of a community awareness event for veterans inside prevention. The VA is also looking to set up booths at each of the Out of the Darkness Walks put on by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Sarah also stated that although the 988 number went operational on July 16 the VA is still distributing printed information with the 1-800 to use up those resources first since the 1-800 number is still in use. Lastly Sarah reported that the ND Suicide Prevention Coalition recently complete a SWOT analysis during a strategic planning session and hope to use the information to guide initiative going forward. They are also working on their website for file storage and a calendar with links to social media. Instead of holding a February conference during the legislative session they are looking to do something else, such as offer training for CEU or non-CEU gatekeeper training. They will start planning soon.

NDDVA – Lonnie Wangen reported that the ND Supreme Court has approved the ND Veteran’s Court. As for the Veterans Cemetery there has been a lot of miscommunication about the facility Lonnie feels most of that has been resolved. Anyone with further questions on the matter can contact him. Lonnie then described his trip to the Governor’s Challenge meeting of the states in Virginia. There were so many breakout sessions with good information, couldn’t go to them all. He talked about how some states are successful at getting gun shops and shooting ranges to store veterans’ guns temporarily. We also received a verbal okay from SAMSHA to receive a report of the calls to 988 from ND and any demographics we can obtain. Relating to the lack of coroner information, Oregon has instituted a Release of Information for vital records that the family can sign to let a veterans suicide review team do a deeper psychological dive into what led to the suicide that will ultimately help to inform suicide prevention efforts. We will obtain a copy and run it by the AG’s office for input. Cass County already has something similar, and it works well. One other thing we learned is that SAMSHA is also planning to put together a database similar to First Link, but it would be up to the states to populate the data base with information. Lastly, we asked SAMSHA and the VA to hold this conference annually if not regionally as there are so many good ideas that we can adopt from states that have been successful. Michelle mentioned that the PowerPoints for each presenter at the breakout session are on the ND Governor’s Challenge website.

ND Senate – Sen. Dever states that he has talked to Lonnie about some of the upcoming legislation concerning topic mentioned today and he also stated that was recently elected commander of the AMVETS Post #9 in Bismarck. They are getting ready for the stand down August 25. Michelle also spoke briefly again about the Bridges for the Fallen legislation to name a bridge in Jamestown.

**Administrative Report**

Michelle Panos reported that the Tricare working group has done its due diligence trying to work with Tricare and Defense Health Agency (DHA) to resolve the issues facing North Dakota. We recently had a meeting with DHA and they immediately stated that they had no authority to grant waivers and all they were going to do is listen to our concerns. They told us the areas of law that would need to change. The next phase will involve the congressional delegation. MAJ Sheldon will coordinate those efforts. Lastly, she noted that McKenzie County, Dickinson, Arnegard, and Alexander will all become ND Cares partner communities within the next couple of months. She also received a phone call from the town of Mohall asking questions about the process is.

**Events**

There were no questions about the events as listed in the agenda.

**Next Meetings**

The next Coalition meeting will be on Nov 3, 2022, and the next Executive Committee meeting is Sept 8, 2022.