**ND Cares Coalition Meeting Minutes**

**February 3, 2022**

Shelly Sizer opened the meeting with a roll call of coalition members. There were 36 people on the call.

**Presentation 1:** ND State Senator Richard Marcellais from District 9 Roulette County, spoke about the State of the Tribal Veteran.First he explained his military background and veteran/military focused activities and legislation. Of note his is working on a Turtle Mountain Veterans Center and 20-unit veterans Homeless Shelter and veterans’ park. Suicide prevention, employment assistance and substance use disorder are big issues across the state. Transportation to VA medical appointments is a problem. He suggests information on benefits needs to disseminate differently as online information cannot be accessed due to a lack on computers and modern phone. We can even use the radio KEYA. Shelley recommended the state could travel to reservations to perform suicide prevention training. Amy Ruff, Resilience Coordinator for the National Guard mentioned the Partnership in Prevention program and offered serves. Senator Marcellais reminded everyone that each nation operates differently so the approaches for assists must differ as well. Kora also recommended contacting FirstLink to offer training.
FirstLink also answers the Native American crisis line.

**Presentation 2:** Shelly Sizer, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army (CASA) described the Secretary’s priorities: A sustainable and strategic path for the Army, fostering a positive command climate utilizing My Squad and the Golden Triangle, recruitment and retention, the reduction of harmful behaviors, strengthening data and cyber skills technology, and force resiliency. There will also be climate change initiatives coming such as solar technology. The priorities for state CASAs: recruiting, and assistance to soldiers transitioning to civilian life. She also discussed the barriers to recruitment that must be addressed. Finally, Shelly reviewed how the Army is positioning personnel in Europe to help deter aggression from Russia.

**Presentation 3:** Blake Sykes, of the U.S. Dept. of Labor presented on the Homeless Program Grant where he seeks out the homeless military veterans through community partners and help them find jobs. The program also provides training, career assessments, mentoring, job appropriate clothes, and tools. He also connects them with the DVOP (Disabled Veteran Outreach Program) through Job Service. Many of the veterans he helps have behavioral health issues and sometimes it’s a family member with the health issue that effects the veteran. Transportation, access to the internet, limited technology knowledge are barriers to successful employment. If you see a homeless veteran refer them to SSVF first to address housing then they can be referred to Blake and the Homeless program for employment. The Homeless Program can provide assistance to those with only one day of service while the DVOP program required 180 days. He is available Monday through Friday.

Lonnie stated that the NDDVA received $150,000 in DARPA money to transport veterans that live within 10 miles of bigger cities. There are six transit providers signed on but they are working with a couple of other that will consider waiving their fees. The DAV vans travel from Golden Valley to the VA in Fargo and vans in the Wahpeton area, Minot, and Cavalier Pembina areas bring veterans to appointments. Also, 36 of our 53 counties qualify for the Highly Rural Transportation Grant where veterans can be picked up at their door, go to medical appointments, make ancillary stops such as to the grocery store, then back home, at no cost to them. The VA Urgent Care grant will pay for cab rides home from the VA. The NDDVA also pays for off duty ambulance drivers to bring veterans to appointments (involving procedures where they cannot drive themselves home), and help with medications or any aftercare instructions – like a family member would do. The VA also has a transportation reimbursement program. Bus services like Souris Basin or the Fargo MAT will veterans rides for free.

*Bottom Line: Call your local VSO or Lonnie for any transportation issues.*

**Coalition Member Updates**

LTC Ann Willoughby introduced herself as the new head of the National Guard Family Support Centers.

Davina French reported that TAPS to fulfill the MOU that was signed six months ago by planning for training, new procedures, intake forms, etc. She will provide a brief at the next ND Cares meeting.

Summer Hanson from the Fargo VA, reported that her team is working on a project to reach out to veterans who have a service connection disability identified by the VBA and are not engaged and enrolled in the VA Health Care System and informing them of benefits and assessing for psychosocial stressors that need addressing. Safe At Home is a 12-week program with 5-8 veterans in each cohort that teaches ways to better interact in intimate partner relationships to reduce abuse and domestic violence. Interested veterans can contact the VA.

BG Jackie Huber reported that the ND National Guard (NDNG) as performed over 130,000 man-days of COVID support to the state – the largest operation in Guard history. The NDNG had over 500 deployed between the army and the air guard although Air Guard numbers are lower since some have returned. There are guardsman in the National Capitol Region, the Southwest border, and in Kuwait. Right now there are no planned deployments with regards to Ukraine. She also talked about activities of the CR2C and mentioned fatigue was noticed among the force as they deal with separating personal lives and what’s happening internationally. The Guard is monitoring the force and ready to provide any needed support. Finally, last fiscal year was the best recruiting year – we stands at 99% force strength.

Kora Dockter of the ND Suicide Prevention Coalition (NDSPC) talked about the upcoming Feb 16 Conference, the associated CEUs, and promoted their Native American speaker. February 25, the Bismarck Bobcats hockey team will have a suicide prevention night and coalition members will get a discount and food coupons. Kora also reminded the coalition that we cannot be satisfied with the status quo on suicide prevention and we need to focus and “what could be” and work toward it. The NDSPC will be recruiting for their executive committee, advisory committee and general coalition members.

Michelle Swanson, community resource specialist from FirstLink talked about the upcoming film festival called Silence Speaks Aloud encouraging young people in high school and college to make 60-90 second videos about how mental health has impacted their lives. The submission deadline is April 28th.

Andrea Peters, Grand Forks AFB violence prevention integrator and suicide prevention program manager introduced herself and looks forward to future collaboration.

Cassie Roness of Military OneSource reported that veterans’ eligibility for services was extended from six months to 1 year. Their Wounded Warrior program specialty consultation participants receive services for as long as they are in the program. Un-remarried spouses and their children are always eligible for Military OneSource benefits and resources. Lastly, Cassie mentioned that she is offering ASIST Training and refresher course on stress management resiliency resources offered. Providers can also sign up for a Military OneSource account to have access to resources for service member and families.

Amy Ruff, NDNG Resilience, Risk Reduction and Suicide Prevention Mgr. stated that NDNG has been licensed by Behavioral Health Services to provide 16 hour DUI seminars and 8-hour minor in possession or minor in consumption courses. This early intervention program is an approved National Guard Bureau pilot, for possible implementation in a states and territories. She then talked about activities on suicide prevention. The Nathan Griffin project has been pushed up to the Bureau level with viewing as required annual training. There will be new Army regulation for chain-teaching about suicide prevention from leaders to squad level. Amy also talked about her involvement in the National Guard Bureau’s Suicide Prevention Task Force, where 19 recommendations were developed. More on the implementation of the recommendations to come.

Pam Sagness from the ND Behavioral Health Division discussed roll out of the Kognito program in schools. The program trains people on how to actually have the conversation about suicide, mental health and addiction – not just knowing who to call. There are modules so one can practice talking with students of different ages and receive feedback on one’s progress. She also reported that North Dakota has experience significant mental health impacts of COVID with an increasing number of people need all levels of care. They are looking for private hospitals for additional inpatient units. For peer support, Pam reported that we know have 115 certified peer support specialist as a part of the 700 trained in peer support. COVID has effected staffing and clients at the state hospital and life skills transition centers. The mobile crisis units are now operating 24-7 in all regions. FirstLink is the first point of contact for the program. The mental health registry will be stood up in July so people can easily find a provider. It will include what insurances they accept, and what specialty services they offer. The second is a psychiatric addiction and residential bed management system to better understand capacity. Lastly Pam talked about the Community Connect Program and demonstrated the website. The program connects those with a mental health or substance use issue to care coordination, peer support and recovery services that are paid for by the state. Connections can also be made to housing, employment, financial, parenting and other services. The program is available 24/7.

MAJ Michele Thomson, NDNG Resilience Coordinator reported that, as a judge advocate for her military position, she is on National Guard Bureau suicide prevention working group for legal issues. Upwards of 25% of our soldiers that die by suicide have legal problems at the time of their death: criminal misconduct, divorce, child custody, etc. The Air Force uses a checklist for what their leaders should be looking for while talking to airmen who have legal issues. For the Resiliency program, the Army Guard will vignettes on various topics like failing a Land NAV, the new Army Combat Fitness Test, and marksmanship qualification. The Guard plans to train leadership to look for other stressors such as financial, relationship or legal issues.

Kelli Weiand of Military Outreach reported that due to poor weather conditions she performed some outreach activities via the phone or online. Last month she participated in the North Dakota Point in Time count of homeless in the state and she was recently appointed to the Minot Vet Center Advisory Board.

Dr. Weintraub of the Fargo VA, reported that COVID case numbers are really high but hospitalizations haven't gone up nearly to the same extent and fewer people on a ventilator. Currently about 50% of inpatients are COVID positive. Maintaining staffing has been difficult due to staff illness or caregiving an ill family member. Even so, the VA was maintain services throughout. Travel is still being restricted to mission critical travel but hopefully that will be lifted soon as the number of cases drop across the county. Lastly he stated that the VA is ready to assist North Dakota with the Governors Challenge.

John Jeziorske, Community Support Coordinator from Minot Air Force Base reported that they have a task for working on addressing domestic violence sexual harassment and assault. There is a big focus this month for teen dating violence. The DUI task force is still active recently discovered that many on base didn’t believe there was a DUI problem on base so the base put up a digital message board with prevention messaging a the number of days since the last DUI and the last unit to get a DUI. The result was that families are starting to have prevention conversations with their kids. The base is also working in on-boarding airmen to prepare them to come to Minot and highlighting the benefits of being there. They are working with the University of Rochester on a hybrid suicide prevention slash community resilience program and they are also part of a 90-day pilot project utilizing the meditation and mindfulness app called Headspace to determine if the program should go Air Force wide. Lastly he mentioned they are still holding events and offering services under the “You Matter” campaign.

**ND Cares Administrative Report**

Michelle reported that the cities of Columbus and Jamestown are now community partners and relayed details of the sign presentation events. For the budget update, Michelle explained that only we executed only 28% with 72% remaining. She showed a summary of radio and TV spots aired with the North Dakota Broadcaster Association contract. There were no new donations in the last six months. Under strategic plan updates, Michelle reported the ND Cares will run a Nathan Griffin spot and a 988 spot for FirstLink, new ads for the veteran’s home and will continue to run the Steve Anderson spots until mid-summer. She plans to have an article in an upcoming ad in the ND League of Cities, City Scan publication. Lastly she talked about the Governor Challenge to Reduce Veterans Suicides and the technical assistance offered from SAMHSA and the VA. The next step would be to form a working group. Because we received he invitation late, SAMHSA has given North Dakota an extension of time to decide to participate.

**Events**

Events were discussed as listed in the agenda.

**Next Meetings**

The next Coalition meeting will be on May 5, 2022, and the next Executive Committee meeting is June 2, 2022.

**Closing**

Shelly ended the meeting at approximately 3:51 pm.