 **ND Cares Executive Committee Meeting Minutes**

**October 6, 2021**

Attendees Connie Sprynczynatyk, Cindy Whitesell, Lonnie Wangen, Dr. Weintraub, BG Jackie Huber, Pam Sagness, LTC Shawn Flemmer, Michelle Panos.

(all virtual)

Absent Joyal Meyer, Davina French, David Becker.

**1. Opening.** Connie briefly opened the meeting.

**2. Minutes.** Minutes from the Aug 18, 2021, meeting were accepted as written.

**3.** **Presentation:** Mark Johnson, Director of the North Dakota Veterans Home reported on the state of the Veterans Home. The COVID vaccination rates for residents are 93% and for staff its about 54-56%.

They are trying not to force staff vaccinations for fear of losing staff. They are already short seven CNAs and may lose 20 more employees. The Home has used extra pay and bonuses as incentives for employee retention as they can go anywhere and work. The contract company that supplies nurses is asking for $100/per hour for CNAs and $120 for nurses and $130 for RN’s. If the staffing issue continues the Home will have to combine or shutdown units. This a problem with all medical practices, even Sanford. The resident census runs about 50% statewide. Other programs from the VA are keeping in people in their homes longer, which effects the Home’s census. ND Cares will continue to work with the Veterans Home on future advertising as needed.

**4. Old Business**

* Michelle explained that the number of ND Cares Businesses and Communities is still 19 and 49 and reported on the many contacts she talked to at the ND League of Cities Annual Conference in Bismarck. She will be sending thank you cards to those who visited the ND Cares booth and follow up with phone calls to select cities. For the Strategic Plan Update Michelle reported that the Steve Anderson video and radio spots are running, and the feedback has been positive. Steve has been asked to do live interviews. Michelle played the TV spot but the sound wasn’t working so she will try to send a link to everyone. She can now continue editing the Military Reference Guide now that the Space Force as decided on enlisted insignia. She also mentioned that in July of this year the Cavalier Air Force Station was renamed the Cavalier Space Force Station so its important to reword the guide with this new information. For the newsletter, Michelle plans to receive Adobe Spark training so the newsletter can look similar to the Tagline, the North Dakota National Guard weekly newsletter. The ND Cares newsletter will likely be a quarterly newsletter if there is enough content.
* **Executive Committee Updates**
  + **Co-Chair:** Cindy Whitesell reported that suicides increased significantly so prevention will be a special focus. She will also attend the MAC meeting is Minot to advertise the Minot Stand Down on the 21st.
  + **ND Dept. of Veterans Affairs:** Lonnie Wangen stated that the program that Mark Johnson referred to is a VA program that pays veterans’ family members to care for Veterans who are 70% disabled or greater. Lonnie also discussed a $147,000 request for Rural Transportation Grant out of ARPA money. Another request will be for funding rural broadband to support veterans’ healthcare. He will be testing new telehealth technology utilizing a veteran’s television that includes automatic reminders and even an automatic “on” as a convenience to the veteran. Recent training for the veterans court went well and he is hopeful the finished program will be approved by the ND Supreme Court this biennium. Lonnie met with the new VA deputy secretary and discussed hyperbaric treatment and increased funding. Lastly Lonnie stated that he hopes North Dakota can be a pilot state implementing the PAWS Act which supplies service dogs to veterans for the treatment of PTSD.
  + **Fargo VA:** Dr. Weintraub reported that there were 175 community attendees at their recent SAVE training. The VA is also performing “caring contacts” which provides emergency department patients with follow-up phone calls for up to one year. Research shows this works. The 2021 national VA Suicide Prevention Annual Report showed, for the first time, a 7.2% overall decrease in suicides from 2018 2019. This is first time since possibly the mid-2000s, that there was any kind of decrease. The VA has conducted several outreach events including a KFGO radio interview Suicide Prevention Coordinator Tammy Monsebroten.
  + **ND Dept. of Human Service:** Pam Sagness reported that there was an additional $4,000,000.00 for Community Behavioral Health put in the governor 's proposal for consideration during the continued session in November and there is legislative support for that issue. For suicide prevention, disaster mental health funding is available to 21 counties in the state. Anyone who's a provider of mental health services can apply and be able to get grief services to individuals. There is also some funding for community engagement. Pam will forward information for dissemination.
  + **NDNG:** BG Huber reported that approx. 125 service members from the 957th Engineer Company out of Bismarck will be going to the Southwest border for a year. There will be a send-off on Friday at 1:00 o'clock at the Bismarck BSE Community Bowl. On Oct 24th at 1:00 there will be a home event for the 285th that came back at the end of August from the nation 's capital where they were doing aviation support. There are also about 70-75 service members assisting the state with COVID mapping, continuing through December. Approx. 51% of the National Guard is vaccinated. The Air Guard must be vaccinated by Dec 2, 2021, and the Army Guard has until June 30, 2022. The Guard is currently accessing medical and religious exemptions. The NDNG is implementing a pilot suicide prevention program called Cognito – Together strong. The Army Guard will participate in this virtual training that uses interactive avatars to help soldiers effectively communicate with peer who may be thinking of suicide. A small test with new recruits was well received. A “train the trainer” session will take place this weekend. Lastly, BG Huber reported that $15,000,000 in funding for a new Dickinson Armory made it into the National Defense Authorization Act. She also confirmed that National Guard emails will be changing to different formats for different people depending on their status by March.
  + **NDNG:** LTC Shawn Flemmer reported on his experience with Cognito. The program helps you learn the potential reactions of a peer who is struggling based on how you approach the person. The idea is to choose the communicate style that will elicit the best reaction and outcome. For an update on the Griffin Project, Nate Griffin recently briefed the Air National Guard on his experience as a suicide survivor and the feedback produced various positive responses. He will continue to speak to service member groups, especially the high-risk units.
  + **Chairman:** Connie reported that as of today, no successor to Connie as Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army has been named.

**5. Upcoming Events**

* **UPCOMING EVENTS**

1. **First Link ASIST Training**: Oct. 10, Fargo
2. **First Link SafeTalk Training**: Oct 8, Grand Forks.
3. **North Central Veterans Stand Down:** Oct. 21, Minot
4. **Recovery Reinvented 2021:** October 25, Bismarck Event Center/Virtual
5. **ND Behavioral Health & Children and Family Services Conference:** Oct. 26-27 Bismarck Events Center/Virtual – Continuing Education Credit courses available Oct 28.
6. **Behavioral Health Peer Support Training application deadline:** Nov. 1. For those who secured employment contingent upon peer support training. Training is in January 2022.
7. **TAPS Peer Mentor Virtual Training:** Nov. 4, 2021
8. **VA Flu Shot Events in Oct/Nov:** See the [VA website](https://www.va.gov/fargo-health-care/stories/fargo-va-health-care-system-free-flu-shot-clinics-in-september-and-october/) for locations.
9. **NEXT MEETING DATES**

* The next Executive Committee meeting date is Nov 17, 2021 and the next Coalition meeting date is Dec. 9, 2021.