



NATIONAL VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION

Health Policy Unit

On Monday, January 27, 2014, The American Legion's System Worth Saving Task Force is hosting a Town Hall Meeting at 7pm at American Legion Post # 1 2800-B Shallowford Road NE Atlanta, GA 30341 for veterans to discuss the Atlanta VA Medical Center. During the meeting, the Task Force will focus on VA's accomplishments and progress over the past ten years, current issues and concerns as well as VA's five-year strategic plan for several program areas, such as: campus alignment, staffing, enrollment/outreach, hospital programs (e.g. mental health, intensive care unit (ICU), long-term services and support, homelessness programs) information technology and construction programs.

On Tuesday, January 28, 2014, Warren Goldstein, Assistant Director for TBI and PTSD Programs attended the 2014 Recovering Warrior Task Force meeting: "The Department of Defense Task Force on the Care, Management, and Transition of Recovering Wounded, Ill, and Injured Members of the Armed Forces: Public Law 111-84 Section 724"

In 2010, Congress directed the Department of Defense (DoD) to establish the Recovering Warrior Task force (RWTF) to assess the effectiveness of DoD policies and programs for the care, management, and transition of Recovering Warriors (RWs) and make recommendations for improvement. The RWTF will create four annual reports to the DoD, the information in these reports will be gathered through installation visits, business meetings, survey data, relevant reports, coordinating with stakeholder groups, and through input from service members and their families.

The task force concentrates on the following topics, case management, staffing of service-related programs or units for wounded warriors, establishment and effectiveness of performance and accountability standards for warrior transition units and programs, availability of services for traumatic brain injury and post traumatic stress disorder, overall coordination between the DoD and VA, effectiveness of wounded warrior information resources, support available to family caregivers of recovering wounded warriors, legal support available to re-covering wounded warriors and their families, support and assistance provided to recovering wounded warriors as they progress through the military disability evaluation system, interagency matters affecting recovering wounded warriors in their transition to civilian life, and such matters as the Task Force considers appropriate.

On Tuesday, January 28, VA&R staff attended a VHA/VSO Quarterly Meeting at VA. VA gave presentations on VA's Strategic Capital Investment Process, Stepped Care Model and Opioid Safety Initiative and Moving Forward: Online Self Help for Veterans. VA asked for assistance on the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) change in VA's leasing process for Community Based Outpatient Clinics. Legislation has been introduced but currently 27 clinics are in jeopardy of closing since CBOs scoring change requires VA to pay the 20 year costs for lease of a CBOC upfront in the same year it is authorized. VA's rolling out a stepped care model for pain management and The American Legion inquired about staffing. VA conducted a gap analysis and are looking at integrating pain specialists into primary care but have not determined the staffing methodology at this point. Moving Forward is a DoD/VA Mental Health web application with the goal to assist veterans with balancing school and family life, financial difficulties, relationship problems, difficult career decisions, coping with physical injuries and adjustment issues. VA asked Veteran Service Organizations to help promote Moving Forward Web Application in communication with their membership. The link to the Start Moving Forward online resource is : <http://startmovingforward.t2.health.mil/#>.

On Tuesday, January 28, 2014, The American Legion's System Worth Saving Task Force is conducting a site visit of the Atlanta VA Medical Center in Decatur, Georgia. During the visit, the Task Force will focus on VA's accomplishments and progress over the past ten years, current issues and concerns as well as VA's five-year strategic plan for several program areas, such as: VA's budget, campus alignment, staffing, enrollment/outreach, hospital programs (e.g. mental health, intensive care unit (ICU), long-term services and support, homelessness programs) information technology and construction programs. Due to the weather conditions, the visit was cut short but the Task Force was able to meet with the offices of budget, staffing, enrollment/outreach, the patient advocate, quality management, mental health, intensive care services, and construction.

On Wednesday, January 29, VA&R staff met with representatives from the Hot Springs Save the VA Committee and National Trust for Historic Preservation. The purpose of the meeting was to understand what concerns the Save the VA and National Trust for Historic Preservation has with VA's decision to close Hot Springs VA Medical Center, in Hot Springs, South Dakota. The VA&R Health Care Policy Unit is planning a follow up site visit to Hot Springs on February 18 &19, 2014 to obtain feedback from the community, stakeholders groups and VA on their proposed plan to close Hot Springs VAMC.

On Thursday, January 30, 2014, Derrick Redd attended DAV Luncheon with Adrian Atizado, Assistant National Legislative Director for DAV, Beth Gugino, Federal Account Manager for Salix Pharmaceuticals Inc. , and Jeffery Weekly, Founder & Principal for Capitol Health Solutions. Salix Pharmaceuticals is a specialty pharmaceutical company committed to the prevention and treatment of gastrointestinal (GI) disorders. For more than 20 years, the organization has licensed, developed, and marketed innovative products to treat GI problems. The organization is looking to expand their reach and relationship with the VA with newer products that will continue to help veterans combat GI disorders.

Claims Unit

Zachary Hearn, Deputy Director of Claims and Steve Henry, Assistant Director of Claims met with representatives from FastYeti on Wednesday, January 29, 2014. FastYeti is a computer software company located in the Tacoma, Washington area and is seeking to create a computer program to assist veterans maintain their records and potentially assist with disability claims.

Assistant Director for Claims, Steven J. Henry conducted LEAD training at Tennessee's Mid- Winter Conference on Saturday, January 25, 2014 in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Since then, he has responded to 12 written veteran inquiries, assisted a veteran with filing his claim for ser-

vice connection, attended a meeting at VA to discuss future projects between VA and American Legion, and attended a meeting at National Veterans Legal Support Program (NVLSP) to discuss ongoing projects.

Military Evaluation Board/Physical Evaluation Board (MEB/PEB)

Brian Buckler, Joint Base Lewis-McChord: conducted 25 interviews, assisted in the completion of 1 CRSC application for combat-related disability benefits, provided MEB/PEB contact information to 8 service members at the SFAC's WDVA/SSI Brief on January 27, 2014 and 24 service members at the PEBLO IDES Brief on January 28, 2014.

Gerardo Avila, MEB/PEB Representative WRNMMC, Fort Belvoir, Fort Meade submitted 2 526EZ (FDC), one written rebuttal for the Medical Evaluation Board and conducted 6 appointments and assisted 10 Service Members by answering questions on the IDES process, VA claims/compensation.

Board of Veterans Appeals Unit

During the week ending January 24, 2014 the Board of Veterans' Appeals reached dispositions on 52 American Legion represented appeals. Of those dispositions 67.3% of the denials were overturned with outcomes favorable to the veteran. In 14 cases, the Board granted benefits outright after considering The American Legion's arguments. In 21 cases, The American Legion was able to point out errors in the development of the veteran's claims which mandated corrective action under the law. Of the total number of dispositions, 12 (23.1%) were outright denials.

Also during this period, the American Legion Appeals Unit reviewed, prepared written Informal Hearing Presentations (IHP), and/or orally argued 87 veteran's appeals. These claims included originals, remands, as well as specialty cases (Advance on Docket, Independent Medical Opinions, Court Remands, etc.). The unit handled telephone inquiries and provided consultations with veterans, VSO's, and Congressional Offices. The administrative team fielded 102 phone inquiries during this period. The appeal representatives conducted 2 Central Office Hearings, including 1 Walk-In.

Insurance, Pension and Debt Management

The VA&R VA Insurance unit reviewed and processed 112 applications for new insurance coverage, of which 9 were for Supplemental insurance for totally disabled veterans in the Service-Disabled insurance program, along with 86 disability and settlement claims on other veteran's VA policies. Further case development included 35 phone calls with veterans, family members and VSOs, 61 further insurance inquiries or transactions, and 73 veteran insured's were contacted by mail on their policies, insurance options and action deadlines. There were also 29 direct contacts with VA personnel in regards to correcting or having additional actions taken on veteran's accounts.

The Philadelphia VA&R Pension unit processed 23 new claims for Veterans or Death pensions, along with reviewing and preparing 374 case actions for support of on-going pension benefits. Casework included processing 94 additional transactions and case inquiries to VA, performing 80 audits of Rating reviews and 20 phone contacts with claimants and VSOs. There were 3 personal interview contacts, and 7 waiver of overpayments processed

The VA&R Pension offices in St. Paul and Milwaukee processed 153 new claims for Veteran's pensions and Death pensions, and presented supporting casework material on 122 claims already in progress, while also processing 111 inquiries and pension transactions, and 161 rating review audits with 3 Appeals. Phone contacts with claimants and VSOs amounted to 113 calls handled for the week ending January 29, 2014.

Benefits Delivered at Discharge

The Western BDD Office reviewed 26 BDD claims with 265 issues. Each claim required reviewing the rating, C&P examination, and service treatment records. Additional research was required on some cases. The BDD office also received 12 phone calls from veterans and Department Service Officers throughout the country requesting the status of a claim or had questions concerning a rating. The office provided an update for the status of the claim or provided options concerning the rating. Additionally, one veteran visited the office with general VA benefit questions. The office received and reviewed 83 pieces of VA correspondence.

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Week Ending 1/31/2014