



Veterans Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date/Time/Location: February 10th, 2020 / 10:00 a.m. / Veteran's Conference Room, Whatcom County Health Department
 Committee Members Present: Allan Jensen, John Mitchell, Lynne Graham, Paul Pelot, Richard Conoboy
 Committee Members Absent: Andrea Vance, Robert Hines, Ward Nelson
 Whatcom Co. Health Dept. Staff/Guests: Ann Beck, Human Services Supervisor; Anne Deacon, Human Services Manager; Emily West, Coordinator; Hope Sabiston, Human Services Intern; Liz Harmon-Craig, Veterans Specialist / Bob Mortenson, Chris Brown, Jerry Pitts, Jonathan Penna, Tina Robbings

Agenda Item	Discussion	Action/Who
1. Call to order	Meeting called to order by Chair Lynne Graham	<i>Lynne Graham</i>
2. Roll Call	Roll call, quorum present.	<i>All</i>
3. Review/Approval December, 2019 minutes	Minutes of December 9, 2019 reviewed. Motion made (Richard) and seconded (Allan) to approve minutes as presented. A vote was held and the motion passed.	Motion: To approve the December 9, 2019 minutes as presented. Aye: 5, Nay: 0, Abstain: 0, Absent: 3
4. Reports/Discussion a. Veterans Benefit Administration-Seattle Staff to Brief the Blue Water Navy Veterans Act, Claims Processes, Vocational Rehabilitation Programs b. Veterans Program Presentation to County Health Board on February	a. Jonathan Penna, a Supervisory Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor at the Department of Veteran Affairs shared some modernization initiatives. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starting to modernize the system and encouraging people to engage in remote entitlement decisions and tele-counseling services. Encouraging all to apply for the program. • All case management, case notes, and entitlement determinations are live. This allows counselors to make determinations the day they meet, expedite referral services, etc. • New scheduling system EVA (similar to Amazon Alexa or Siri) that does scheduling for counselors and Veterans. There is a text message 	<i>Jonathan</i>





<p>11, 2020 at 1:30 p.m., Council Chambers c. Veterans Specialist Report</p>	<p>reminder program as well.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging in a piolet program with an electronic records health management system for VRNE services. It will be more seamless to get referrals submitted or updated medical treatment. It is starting in Eastern Washington with the goal to the Western side of the state as well. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Anne asked if the first meeting takes place in person and then following meetings would be via tele-communication and what the wait times are. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The first appointment would be with the counselor in person unless there are major transportation barriers; then the counselor or VOC Rehab representative would be contacted for other options. This is done in a case by case basis. For wait times there is the goal of VOC Rehab is to get Veterans to a counselor within 40 days of application; reach out to Jonathan if an individual is waiting more than 40 days. ○ Anne asked how often the Veteran meets with the counselor after the initial appointment. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The goal of the program is to continually assess the individual's progression towards an outlined goal. They would meet as regularly as needed to ensure the progression is taking place; biannually if not quarterly at minimum. ▪ Paul said to have individuals sent to him for job eligibility and labor market information. ○ Ann asked if individuals are still meeting with their regional counselor if they are using tele-communication or is there the option to talk to a counselor from another region. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ VOC Rehab prefers that Veterans in Whatcom County work with the regional staff in Mt. Vernon as they have more of an understanding of the employment market and have local connections. There are circumstances where they would consider case management from another 	
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	<p>location. Jonathan is usually involved in that decision.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Paul asked what percent disability a person needs to have to have to qualify for the program. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Individuals would need to have 20% service connected disability and an employment handicap. At 10% they need to have a confirmed serious handicap; Jonathan stated to let VOC Rehab rule them out because they will give a reason as to why the individual does not qualify. ○ Liz asked how she could help people get accepted into the program. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Jonathan strongly suggested apply and let VOC Rehab rule them out and will give a reason why they are not eligible for the program. ○ Chris asked if a veteran has already been approved and enrolled but their counselor is encouraging them in a different direction than they want to go; how is this resolved. ○ The first stop is the counselor and if there is no resolution contact Jonathan. <p>Jonathan stated that Frank is retiring but his replacement has been hired and there will be some overlap.</p> <p>Tina gave an overview on Public Law 116-23, the Blue Water Navy Veterans Act. The Act was signed into law June 25th, 2019 and the VBA is responsible for processing the claims. VBA did not start processing claims until January 1st, 2020. To date there are 17,384 claims pending, they are being processed on an average of 37.2 days, since January 1st 3,931 claims have been received, completed 1,782 claims to date. Total retro awards are 62.97 million dollars. The Seattle regional office will hold a town hall at the American Lake VA medical center on Friday February 14th from 3-4 p.m. and Caesar Romero will be hosting (Liz will send out the details). Tina suggested having veterans apply/reapply.</p> <p>The Community Clergy training program had two sessions in Whatcom County and</p>	<p><i>Tina</i></p> <p><i>Bob</i></p>
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	<p>had a total of 25 individuals attend. The next iteration is March 24th at the Lynden VFW post. Bob gave a brief overview of the program.</p> <p>The VHA is going through electronic conversion into the CERNER program and Spokane is the piolet program going live on March 28th and Puget Sound will be second and starting in November. All medical records will go into one centralized system. The group discussed.</p> <p>b. There will be a briefing at tomorrow’s county Council at 1:30 p.m. to give a Veteran’s program update. They will also be informed that at the end of the month two things will come to vote; to change County code to match RCW in the definitions of veteran and to readjust the income level to 60% AMI unless the board advocates for a change. There will be a recap at the next meeting.</p> <p>c. There are 43 VSO claims submitted since the previous meeting. The WDVA first quarter report showed the back pay amount distributed was \$196,079. The current fund balance is \$740,226.40. Bob Hines and Ward Nelson are stepping down from the board.</p>	<p><i>Tina</i></p> <p><i>Liz</i></p> <p><i>Liz</i></p>
<p>5. Good of the Order</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chris shared that they have had an intern graduate and a counselor retire so they are short staffed. Last Friday the district office called and confirmed the job position has closed. They are hoping to have someone March or April. He also expressed interest in reapplying to be on the board. 	
<p>6. Next Meeting</p>	<p>The next meeting will be held Monday April 13th, 2020 at the Whatcom County Health Department, Creekside Conference Room.</p>	<p>Email VHA questions to Liz</p>
<p>7. Adjourned</p>	<p>The meeting was adjourned at 11:36 a.m.</p>	

