

MINUTES

17 April 2008

Oregon State Capitol Building, Room 160

Veterans' Services Task Force

Aging Veterans and Retirement Subcommittee

Attendees: Dan Estes, Marion County, Chair; Jerry Lorang, ODVA Advisory Committee; Jack Heims, Portland VA Medical Center; Frank Van Cleave, Representative DeFazio's Office; Pegge McGuire, Oregon Housing and Community Services; Jeff Bodenweiser, Retired USMC/Veterans Advocate; Sasha Pollack, Senate President's Office; Paula Brown, Veterans' Affairs; Jose Samaniego, Paralyzed Veterans of America; Max Brown, Human Services/Seniors and People with Disabilities (scribe).

Meeting commenced at 3:20 PM.

Criteria for Recommendations of the Subcommittee

Dan Estes opened the meeting by suggesting a list of criteria with which the subcommittee could use to evaluate and forward recommendations. Estes handed out a sheet that listed a) criteria affecting individual veterans (improved access, increased speed, improved quality, improved independence, and expanded benefits), and b) criteria affecting the system of veterans benefits (streamlined process and interagency coordination, increased capacity, and increased awareness). These criteria, along with others, could help the subcommittee screen for policy recommendations, prioritize objectives, and offer recommendations within certain time and fiscal limits.

On the criterion of increased speed, Jerry Lorang mentioned Tiger teams that specialized in claims processing for veterans aged 70 or older. The teams were formed partly in response to the problem of aging veterans who died during lengthy appeals – in effect, the Tiger teams were designed to speed up the claims processes for these veterans. Lorang said that he would get information on the current status of the Tiger teams.

To get the ball rolling on the criteria that Estes introduced, Lorang brought up an example: veterans who are being charged to receive veterans' claims assistance when those services are available at no charge through ODVA, CVSOs and NSOs. In this regard, Lorang mentioned nursing homes where veterans spouses and surviving spouses of veterans are being charged for claims assistance.

Back to the criteria, Estes asked if other criteria should be considered. Sasha Pollack suggested that improved community relationships and social networks may be an important criterion. She elaborated by stating that veterans could benefit with some point-person in their community or with the state, and that point-person could refer a veteran to many benefits either through ODVA, the VA, or other state and local agencies.

Another criterion suggested was the long-lasting effects of a policy recommendation. Would a recommendation have the intent to solve a short-term or a long-term problem? What would be the intended and possible unintended consequences of such a recommendation?

Pollack and Estes also discussed a criterion of cost effectiveness. Pollack mentioned that the economic and revenue forecasts may not be strong during the rest of the biennium and it would be a difficult time to recommend policies that have an increased demand on state revenues.

Universe of Issues:

Estes turned the discussion of issues to discuss, and which the criteria could then be used to make recommendations. The group generated the following issues:

- Wait times for claims processing. With the extensive timelines, what may a good solution?
- Capacity with current VSOs. Are more needed? Paula Brown reported that an intake of a veteran usually took 45-60 minutes, so the average VSO could see would be one client per hour. When appointments run shorter, more veterans are seen. Additional VSOs would increase capacity to see additional veterans.
- Outreach. This is where the pilot project in Independence is crucial for outreach to veterans who may not know the benefits for which they qualify.

- Transportation.
- The impact of the Baby Boomers. ODVA can bring info on the estimates for the aging veteran population. It was mentioned that the average age of a veteran was now 61, and the group briefly discussed the importance of understanding the current health needs of veterans and how those health needs may change over the next ten or twenty years. On this and other issues, Pollack mentioned that the National Conference on State Legislatures has good resources and she will look over what other states are doing on these topics.
- Tied into future planning, the subcommittee discussed cemetery planning. Jack Heims and Frank Van Cleave mentioned that Willamette would likely be full by 2015, and that capacity at Roseburg and Eagle Point are limited. On the subject of constructing new cemeteries, there are fiscal constraints: federal funds can build state veterans cemeteries, but state funds are required to maintain them.
- Employment. While the group is discussing aging veterans, there may be some relevant issues. Some retired veterans are still interested in doing part time or volunteer work, and the possibility of having a single-point resource for a veteran seeking employment or volunteer opportunities was briefly discussed. The possibility of an exception number of hours a PERS retiree could work was discussed.
- System integration? The group briefly discussed the problems of integrating the VA system of records with ODVA. Lorang said that the VA record system has undergone a multiple year project to modernize. When a veteran has a claim submitted, he or she cannot track the status, much less the ODVA. On average, a claim is 42 days along before it is tracked.

Special Topic: Employment

The Oregon Employment Dept. presented on some general employment initiatives through its office and the federal Department of Labor. Programs include the Veterans employment training services, a peer program of veterans helping veterans, as well as the Independence pilot project at the Elks Lodge for outreach regarding employment resources.

For this subcommittee, ODE talked about the age discrimination challenges for veterans over 50. ODE offered resources, including employment

strategies for older veterans, training and retraining, and upgrading existing skills a veteran may have.

Meeting Take-aways:

- The subcommittee will take up the cemetery discussion again after more information is collected.
- ODVA will bring data on future veteran population.
- Lorang will check on the status of the Tiger team.
- NCSL: Pollack will report back on information other states have and efforts other states are making with regard to aging veterans.

Meeting adjourned at 4:55 PM.