

Coos Bay Leadership Meeting Minutes

Participants

Kevin Owens ODVA Advisory Board
Maryann Sackett CVSO
Robert and Marcia Hooper MOPH
Andy Jackson County Sheriff
Bob Main
Karen Clearwater
Gene Melton
Frank Carpenter Employment DVOP
Kathie Creasey Employment
Nikki Whitty County Commissioner
Kevin Stufflebean County Commissioner
John Wallace Roseburg VA
Nick Long CBOC Manager
Frank Van Cleave (DeFazio)
Juine Chada (Wyden)
Ron Kreskey (DeFazio)
The Honorable Wayne Krieger
The Honorable Arnie Roblan
The Honorable Joanne Verger

Paul Evans provided an overview of the Task Force, its process and objectives.

Representative Krieger said that he was concerned about the mental health needs of the veterans. He said that they have needs but don't know they have needs. Jack Heims explained the screening process in place from post-deployment through enrollment in the VA medical system. He also noted that the VA is putting on trainings for clergy and private counselors to train them in working with veterans with PTSD, TBI and other issues.

Marcia Hooper was concerned about the stigma veterans feel being labeled crazy if they seek mental health. Jack Heims explained that the reintegration team is teaching its soldiers that it takes strength and courage to seek help.

Robert Hooper said he was concerned about communication barriers with veterans. He wants to help veterans but cannot get the VAMC or other organizations to pass him the name of veterans so he can contact him. The Task Force explained some privacy issues, but Paul Evans said he would work to get his organization (MOPH) connected with the reintegration team and local guard unit so he might be able to be a resource. Mr. Hooper also was concerned about how to communicate with veterans and how to find them.

A participant said it is a hardship on the veterans to travel 120 miles to Eugene for the Vet Center and 90 miles to Roseburg for the VAMC. Jack Heims explained that there is

an increase of Vet Centers around the nation, especially to rural areas. He also said that some CBOCs and Vet Centers are sending outreach providers to more rural communities.

A participant said that there needs to be better coordination between the Department of Human Services, the Oregon Department of Veterans' Services and the Oregon Housing and Community Services Department. The Task Force agreed and said that coordinating organizations that deal with veterans is a priority. Jack Heims agreed that the left and right hand often are unaware of what each is doing when it comes to veterans' services. However, he said that the twice-yearly summits during which all providers participate has bridged that gap. He also explained his plan to do five regional summits in the future.

County Commissioner Stufflebean said that his experience as a former DHS employee is that there is little coordination between the CVSO and the TANF or SSD program. This should be improved.

Mary Ann Sacket said that she is concerned about the Southwest Oregon Veterans Outreach, which is doing claims work. She feels they are not doing a good job and taking veterans away from her.

Senator Verger asked if the paperwork is that complicated that a veteran cannot fill it out by themselves. Director Willis said no, but the adjudication and appeal process is complicated and a veteran needs an advocate.

Senator Verger advised the Task Force and ODVA to focus on the CVSO's issue of being a single person office.

A participant asked if there is a cap on VA health care benefits. Yes, there is an income means test for Category 8. Commissioner Stufflebean said that he was frustrated that we have to deal with these veterans without resources.

Paul Evans noted that it may be the perfect time to suggest universal health care for veterans via the existing VA health care system.

It was suggested that veterans be told to file their DD-214 at the county.

Representative Roblan noted that if a veteran has one bad experience or has one little stumbling block during the process the veteran will be turned off and not come back for quite a while. This was in response to a concern that the CVSO's office is empty at times and nobody is there to answer the phone. (The CVSO recently took vacation).

Director Willis said there is training available for first responders to train them in dealing with veterans with PTSD, TBI and other issues. Jack Heims said that this training could be brought to Coos Bay.