

Notes for Workgroup on Aging Veterans Issues 10 April, Capitol Room 160

Attendees: Dan Estes, Marion County; Jim Keller, Oregon House Republican Office; H.A. MacDonald, United Veterans of Oregon; Bruce Goldberg, Department of Human Services; Frank VanCleave, Rep. DeFazio's Office; Peter Courtney, State Senate; Sasha Pollack, Senator Courtney's Office; Jerry Lorang, ODVA Advisory Committee; Paula Brown, ODVA; Jim Willis, ODVA; Victor Merced, Oregon Housing and Community Services; Pegge McGuire, Oregon Housing and Community Services; Max Brown, Dept. of Human Services (scribe).

Minutes:

Meeting commenced at 3:30 PM.

Meeting opened with discussion of thinking of future topics, and questions to frame the future discussions. Topics are: employment and workforce issues (17 April), health care (24 April), education (1 May), housing (8 May), and federal VA issues (15 May).

- Material on TriCare will circulate among the group in advance of the health care meeting.
- Suggestion that housing include issues regarding nutrition and food assistance. The group agreed to take up this issue on 8 May.

Topic for 10 April: Revenue.

- Group did not take this particular topic up extensively. Brief discussion on the bill in 2007 session to raise the tax exemption from \$18,000 to \$25,000, but one group pushed for \$50,000 and it scuttled the prospects.

Name of the workgroup:

- The group agreed that aging veterans would be a better name. While there will be discussion on veterans who are seniors and who are retired, there needed to be a looser label to capture veterans at different points on the aging and retirement continuum. The group did not set a minimum age for the group of veterans they'd discuss, since many veterans with disabilities, regardless of age, face similar issues (healthcare, disability payments, etc.).

Veterans Claims Timeframes:

A lengthy discussion followed on the timeframes for processing veterans' claims. ODVA has data on the timeframes (see attachment to minutes below). The VA had funding to hire an additional 1,500 "raters" and there is expectation that claims processing timeframes will decrease. Some important points:

- Rarely does an initial claim meet VA criteria as originally submitted.
- The veteran's claim usually needs one or both of the following:
 - Correct medical documentation to substantiate the claim.
 - Valid documentation to substantiate the claim as either combat- or service-related. This criterion is the most difficult to get documentation.
- Veterans can get assistance on claims through the ODVA, a national veterans' association, or their county veterans' office. Among counties, staffing varies greatly and the timber counties are facing fiscal issues surrounding the loss of federal revenue.
- Among generations of veterans, there is a particular reluctance among WWII and Korean-era veterans to seek claims; this generation takes pride in self-reliance, and there is a perception that if they had their claim processed, it'd displace a claim pursued by a veteran of the Iraq or Afghanistan conflict.
- The VA system is more cumbersome than Canada's, but Canada disburses a 30% default claim with little evidence. By comparison, U.S. requirements are more stringent, but the successful claim is higher and is backed by more evidence to justify the claim.

Veterans in other systems:

Part of the task of this group is to assess and improve veterans' experiences with other state agencies from which they may get services, such as DHS, OHCS, and ODE. It is not common that the other agencies will ask each person coming into their system if she or he is a veteran. All agreed that there are opportunities for ODVA and other state agencies to deepen references and referrals to other services. At the county level, this often happens when the veterans' offices are located next to human services, employment, and/or housing departments.

Veterans' Nursing Homes and Long-Term Care:

A short discussion occurred on the current veterans' home in The Dalles and the possibilities of building a new one in Roseburg. Currently, there is not a waiting list for the one in The Dalles, but it is isolated in a way that many veterans prefer to get care in their local communities. Roseburg presents many advantages for siting a second home: the property has been purchased, there are existing buildings for guests to stay, there is a critical mass of medical professionals, and there is already a pharmacy on site. Care is free if the disability is 70% or more service-related. Costs are only \$109 per day, almost one half the cost of a private nursing facility. Long-range plans may include a 100-bed nursing facility, and beds allocated to an assisted living facility, as well as a specialized facility for Alzheimer's care.

Meeting adjourned at 4:45 PM.

Attachment: Questions and Answers for Claims Timelines:

Below are answers to the questions posed by ODVA during the VSO meeting today regarding timeliness of claims (and the last one is a medical center question):

“1. How long is the wait period between the time a vet files a claim and gets a response from the VA?”

We best measure this using the Average Development Initiation Time, which measures the number of days from the day we receive the claim until the day we take the first development action - typically a VCAA notice to the veteran.

For all rating-related claims: 48.3 days (sample size of 5,282 cases)
For GWOT rating-related claims: 18.4 days (sample size of 559 cases)

“2. How long is the normal claim process?”

One way to measure timeliness is using the Average Days to Complete. We measure this on a monthly basis rather than by fiscal year. The

numbers below are for the entire month of March 2008.

For all rating-related claims: 209.5 days (sample size of completed 1458 cases)

For GWOT rating-related claims: 149.9 days (sample size 184 completed cases)

“3. How long for a NOD (still 14 months?)”

Measuring the 660 Statements of the Case that were mailed from VA to veterans since October 1, 2007, it takes us an average of 475 days from the date of the NODs to decide appeals.

“4. How long for a BVA hearing (still about 2 years?)”

Measuring the 76 appeals that were certified to BVA since October 1, 2007, it takes us an average of 609 days from the date of the NODs to certify cases to BVA.

“5. How long is the wait period for when a vet signs up for VA health care and his/her first appointment?”

According to the Portland VAMC, all patients needing primary care are seen within 30 days at the Portland VAMC. At Roseburg, only 1 patient is pending a primary care appointment beyond 30 days. At White City, 9 patients are pending beyond 30 days.