

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
Advisory Committee on the Readjustment of Veterans
February 05-06, 2025
Virtual: Microsoft Teams
9:00AM – 4:30PM (EST)
MINUTES

Wednesday, February 05, 2025:

Attendees:

Committee Members Present:

Heather Nystrom
Khamkay Chitaphong
Cheryl Jacobs
Isaac Pike
Grover Wind
Mark Fleming
Patricia Ross
Cory Pearson
Abigail Deluca
Danica Thomas

Department of Veterans Affairs Staff Present:

Joshua Mathis, Designated Federal Officer
Matthew Newman, Assistant Designated Federal Officer
Michael Fisher, Chief Officer, Readjustment Counseling Service
Abbie Lieberum, Vet Center Director, White Oak Vet Center
Phillip Grant, Vet Center Director, Lancaster Vet Center
Scott Winters, Vet Center Director, DuBois Vet Center
Jelessa Burney, Program Analyst, Advisory Committee Management Office

Public Attendees:

Names not provided due to their being Vet Center clients, who were presenting on and discussing their personal experiences with Readjustment Counseling Service (RCS).

Opening Remarks:

At 9:00 a.m., Designated Federal Officer Joshua Mathis welcomed the Committee members and guests, initiated housekeeping items, and discussed virtual meeting decorum. He then invited non-committee members to introduce themselves for the record. There were a number of non-committee members, including both VA staff and

members of the public; those individuals are identified above in the minutes, where possible due to client confidentiality.

Committee Chair Heather Nystrom called the meeting to order, took a roll call to establish a quorum, and provided an overview of the meeting, including a review of the day's agenda.

Presentation:

At 9:15 a.m., DFO Mathis and Chair Heather Nystrom led the Committee in reviewing the Committee objectives and charter. They also provided an overview of the Committee report process moving forward and recapped the previous meeting held on November 5-6, 2024.

Chair Heather Nystrom led brief member introductions, including introductions of two of the newer members of the committee, who were unable to attend the November meeting. These introductions included background information, experience, biographical information, and personal interest discussions.

Presentation:

At 9:30 a.m., the Chief Officer of Readjustment Counseling Service (RCS), Michael Fisher, welcomed the Committee and made remarks. Mr. Fisher provided the committee with an update on the status of the recommendations from the 24th report that were specific to RCS; these included updates to vacancy rates, staff pay grades, and timely hiring.

He discussed numerous topics that the committee requested, including pipelines for recruitment, access to care, expansion of services, and outreach to and delivery of care for members of the National Guard and Reserve Component.

Mr. Fisher again shared information and updates regarding broader Vet Center outreach efforts. He provided updates regarding the Vet Center Outreach Application, which was designed to help modernize the data collection and documentation of RCS's outreach efforts.

The Chief Officer then opened the discussion to questions.

Presentation:

At 10:00 a.m., the committee was given a virtual tour of the Lancaster Vet Center in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Due to the sensitivity associated with a tour of the Vet Center, as well as some of the topics of discussion, this portion of the meeting was closed to the public and held on a separate, private Microsoft Teams link, provided only to Committee members and those whose involvement was required for the meeting and presentation. Lancaster Vet Center Director Phillip Grant led the virtual tour, where he showed the

physical space to the committee and talked about the Vet Center's history, staff, clients, service area, and the services provided.

The Vet Center team discussed their services and roles with the committee. They shared trends they are seeing amongst those they serve and effective practices, both clinically and regarding outreach.

The Committee utilized a focus group with the Vet Center staff to discuss the presented topics and ask questions. Topics focused on effective practices, ongoing needs, and issues specific to National Guard and Reserve Component members.

Presentation:

At 11:30 a.m., the Committee received a brief regarding the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) for the National Guard and Reserve Component members. This portion of the meeting was also closed to the public and held on a private Microsoft Teams link due to an active client participating in the presentation and discussion.

TAP presentation included an overview of the program, the history of the program, and the evolution of the program as it related to increasing awareness of Vet Centers for service members. Presenters shared effective practices and current challenges with TAP attendance, participation, and connecting service members to VA.

An active Vet Center client also shared their own personal experience with TAP, engaging services with VA, including Vet Centers, and some of the challenges they experienced associated with it.

The Committee had a brief question and answer before breaking for lunch.

The Committee adjourned for lunch at 12:00 p.m.

The Committee reconvened from lunch at 1:00 p.m.

Presentation:

At 1:00 p.m., the Committee received briefs from three separate Pennsylvania Vet Center Directors. This portion of the meeting was open to the public. Among the presenters were Abbie Lieberum, Vet Center Director of the White Oak Vet Center, Scott Winters, Vet Center Director of the DuBois Vet Center, and Phillip Grant, Vet Center Director of the Lancaster Vet Center.

These briefs consisted of each Vet Center Director providing overviews of the Vet Center, including their team makeup, Veteran service area, demographics, and visit data. Additionally, each of the Vet Centers discussed trends and challenges they were experiencing as it relates to providing services to members of the National Guard and Reserve Component. Each Vet Center Director also shared effective and promising

strategies that they were utilizing and identified opportunities to further optimize their services to members of the National Guard and Reserve Component.

A focus group followed these presentations with the Committee members and the Vet Center Directors to discuss the presented topics and ask questions. Topics focused on opportunities for optimization, engagement with the TAP program, and comparing effective strategies of each of the Vet Centers.

The Committee adjourned for a 15-minute break at 2:15 p.m.

The Committee reconvened from the break at 2:30 p.m.

Focus Group:

At 2:30 p.m., the Committee participated in a focus group with a group of current National Guard and Reserve Component clients. This portion of the Committee meeting was closed to the public to ensure client confidentiality; a separate private Microsoft Teams meeting was used to ensure appropriate privacy. The client panel was encouraged to introduce themselves and discuss their experiences with seeking services at the VA. This included sharing their pre-existing knowledge of the services available to them, outreach provided to them, and other barriers to care. The client panel also discussed positive experiences, specifically related to the services they received from Vet Centers.

Committee members asked questions about barriers to care, including understanding eligibility and available services. Access to care, telehealth, and travel time were also discussed.

Committee Discussion:

At 4:00 p.m., Committee Chair Heather Nystrom led the committee in discussing the day's presentations. Discussion focused on key takeaways from the presentations and focus group discussions with Vet Center Directors and the client panel. Committee discussion also revolved around how the information could be best utilized to develop the 25th report.

Adjournment:

At 4:30 p.m., Committee Chair Heather Nystrom and DFO Josh Mathis recapped the day's presentations and provided an overview of the material planned for the next day.

The Committee adjourned for the day at 4:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 05, 2024:

Attendees:

Committee Members Present:

Heather Nystrom
Khamkay Chitaphong
Cheryl Jacobs
Isaac Pike
Grover Wind
Mark Fleming
Patricia Ross
Cory Pearson
Abigail Deluca
Danica Thomas

Department of Veterans Affairs Staff Present:

Joshua Mathis, Designated Federal Officer
Matthew Newman, Assistant Designated Federal Officer
Michael Fisher, Chief Officer, Readjustment Counseling Service
Jelessa Burney, Program Analyst, Advisory Committee Management Office
Carmen Drummond, Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans
Lynda Davis, Advisory Committee on Women Veterans
Veronica Duncan, Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs
Peter Kaboli, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee
Jadine Piper, Advisory Committee on Disability Compensation

Public Attendees:

Wanda Wright, Advisory Committee on Women Veterans
Evelyn Lewis, Advisory Committee on Disability Compensation
Frank LoGalbo, Advisory Committee on Disability Compensation

Opening Remarks:

At 9:00 a.m., Designated Federal Officer Joshua Mathis welcomed the Committee members back for the second and final day of the meeting and provided an overview of the day's agenda. Committee Chair Heather Nystrom did a roll call to ensure there was a quorum and provided a brief recap of the previous day's material.

Presentation:

At 9:15 a.m., the Committee received a presentation from the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans. This presentation included an overview of the committee, its membership, charter, historical recommendations, and current priorities.

The Committee asked questions about current priorities and possible future priorities in an effort to ensure the Advisory Committee on the Readjustment of Veterans didn't duplicate efforts and was complimentary to the ongoing work of the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans.

Presentation:

At 9:45 a.m., the Committee received a presentation from the Advisory Committee on Women Veterans. This presentation included an overview of the committee, its membership, charter, historical recommendations, and current priorities.

The Committee asked questions about current priorities and possible future priorities in an effort to ensure the Advisory Committee on the Readjustment of Veterans didn't duplicate efforts and was complimentary to the ongoing work of the Advisory Committee on Women Veterans.

Presentation:

At 10:15 a.m., the Committee received a presentation from the Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs. This presentation included an overview of the committee, its membership, charter, historical recommendations, and current priorities.

The Committee asked questions about current priorities and possible future priorities in an effort to ensure the Advisory Committee on the Readjustment of Veterans didn't duplicate efforts and was complimentary to the ongoing work of the Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs.

The Committee adjourned for a 15-minute break at 10:45 a.m.

The Committee reconvened from break at 11:00 a.m.

Presentation:

At 11:00 a.m., the Committee received a presentation from the Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee. This presentation included an overview of the committee, its membership, charter, historical recommendations, and current priorities.

The Committee asked questions about current priorities and possible future priorities in an effort to ensure the Advisory Committee on the Readjustment of Veterans didn't duplicate efforts and was complimentary to the ongoing work of the Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee.

Presentation:

At 11:30 a.m., the Committee received a presentation from the Advisory Committee on Disability Compensation. This presentation included an overview of the committee, its membership, charter, historical recommendations, and current priorities.

The Committee asked questions about current priorities and possible future priorities in an effort to ensure the Advisory Committee on the Readjustment of Veterans didn't duplicate efforts and was complimentary to the ongoing work of the Advisory Committee on Disability Compensation.

The Committee adjourned for lunch at 12:00 p.m.

The Committee reconvened from lunch at 1:00 p.m.

Committee Discussion:

At 1:00 p.m., the Committee Chair, Heather Nystrom, led the Committee in a discussion designed to map out the drafting of the 25th report. As a group, the Committee spent 30 minutes considering all of the information they heard from this and previous meetings.

Together, they identified issues and challenges facing VA that fall within the scope of the Committee and on which the Committee could provide valuable recommendations. Individually, the Committee members then brainstormed areas in which VA could improve the readjustment of Veterans and presented these ideas to the rest of the Committee. Committee members engaged in thoughtful discussion of each other's ideas and topics.

The Committee adjourned for a 15-minute break at 2:15 p.m.

The Committee reconvened after break at 2:30 p.m.

After reconvening at 2:30 p.m., the Committee continued mapping out the 25th report. As a group led by Chair Nystrom, the Committee identified the common themes and topics that individual members presented. They identified items that had overlap or were consensus topics and ideas that diverged from the others.

The Committee began discussing and drafting recommendations using the SMART Goals template based on the common themes. As specific recommendations began to form, Chair Nystrom assigned specific recommendations to members who volunteered to write the drafts for the report.

Public Comment:

At 3:30 p.m., there were no members of the public present to provide public comment.

Wrap-up:

At 3:30 p.m., RCS Chief Officer Michael Fisher gave a brief closing statement, thanking the Committee for their work.

DFO Joshua Mathis and Committee Chair Heather Nystrom discussed the dates of future meetings and possible locations for the on-site portions of the visit. The Committee recapped the day's briefings and summarized the planning and prioritization exercise.

Committee Chair Heather Nystrom adjourned the meeting at 4:00 p.m.

/s/Heather Nystrom
Committee Chair
May 5, 2025

/s/Joshua A. Mathis
Designated Federal Officer
May 5, 2025