

New Hampshire Military Leadership Team

*A Meeting to Build Partnerships & Improve Services for
New Hampshire Veterans, Service Members and their Families*

April 19, 2021

10:00am – 11:30am

Webex Virtual Platform

New Hampshire Military Leadership Team Attendance

X	Major General David Mikolaities, Adjutant General, NH National Guard
X	Warren Perry, Deputy Adjutant General, NH National Guard; MLT Co-Chair
X	Kevin Forrest, Director, Manchester VA Medical Center; MLT Co-Chair
X	Amy Cook, Administrator, Community Based Military Programs, NH DMAVS; MLT Facilitator
X	Jim Adams, Chair, NH State Veterans Council
X	Steve Ahnen, President, NH Hospital Association
X	Matt Albuquerque, Next Step Bionics and Prosthetics
X	Pete Burdett, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army
X	Madeline Dreusicke, NH State Veterans Council
X	Brendan Finn, NH State Veterans Council
A	William Gaudreau, Director, Division of Veteran Services, NH DMAVS
X	Jason Grower, Regional Director of Operations, Dead River Company
X	Margaret LaBrecque, Commandant, NH Veterans Home
X	Paul Lloyd, Chair, State Veterans Advisory Committee
X	Bradley Mayes, Director, VA Regional Benefits Offices in MA, NH & VT
A	Ginger Munson, Family Representative
X	Jeffrey Newman, Administrator, Division of Higher Education, NH Department of Education
A	Dr. Brett Rusch, Director, WRJ VA Medical Center
X	Roger Sevigny, NH Veterans Council
X	Pam Szacik, Employment Service Bureau Director, NH Employment Security
GUESTS IN ATTENDANCE:	
X	Carol Hitchcock, WRJ VA Medical Center
X	Corey Beem, Manchester VA Medical Center
X	Sarah Morrissey, NHES
X	Ena Lima, VA Regional Benefits Offices
X	Marcos Lugo, VA Regional Benefits Offices
X	Dr. Becky Rhoads, Associate Director, WRJ VA Medical Center

Meeting Minutes

I. Review of February Minutes—No corrections made to the February minutes. Matt A. moved to accept the minutes as written. Steve A. 2nd, all members approved.

II. Initiative Status Updates

Veteran-Friendly Business Recognition Program Update—Amy Cook

An Advisory Panel consisting of MLT members, representatives from the recognized businesses and other community partners and stakeholders met 3/25/21. The Panel serves to provide feedback and make recommendations about how to grow and further develop the program in the future. There was a lot of energy and ideas at the meeting. The next meeting will be in June. In the meanwhile, revisions are being made to the 2021 application and it will soon be available on the DMAVS website for businesses to submit for 2021 recognition. Applications will be reviewed July-August. A recognition event will take

place in late fall/early winter 2021, but may look different than 2020 depending on the number of businesses.

Virtual Living Room—Paul Lloyd

Paul confirmed with Berlin VFW that they are still interested in being a host site for a Virtual Living Room and a new point of contact has been provided. They are still looking into funding possibilities that will assist with the cost of adding a handicap ramp to the building.

Supports for Military Spouses/Families—Ginger Munson & Amy Cook

The final meeting of partners exploring supports for Military Spouses/Families was held on 3/2. A survey has been created that is now being distributed to military spouse and family members to complete. The online survey will ask questions about issues facing military families in NH, where they seek information & supports and their experiences when doing so.

Ginger and Amy have been meeting with NAMI NH to explore the possibility of partnering with them on their Facebook Group. NAMI NH has a military family Facebook Group with 400+ established members, so it makes sense to promote and expand on that page rather than create a new one to communicate with NH families. The survey will close 5/31.

III. Old Business

- A. Bylaws were signed by Major General Mikolaities and are available on the DMAVS—MLT website page.

IV. New Business

None

V. Information Briefs

Dept of Military Affairs & Veterans Services & NHNG Update—Major General Mikolaities

Today is Day 400 of NHNG serving and supporting COVID relief efforts in New Hampshire. 700 individuals are still activated today, 25% of the force.

The NHNG experienced a suicide death 2 months ago.

DMAVS briefed the Veterans Caucus last Friday. Celebrating 3-year anniversary of operating as DMAVS. The Veterans Bill of Rights passed last summer has resulted in state funding for three new positions in the Division of Community Based Military Programs. DCBMP will go from 2 full time staff to five.

A variety of initiatives are taking place in New Hampshire to address the needs of Service members and Veterans in their communities and civilian lives. The Joint Military Task Force (Gov Commission on Alcohol & Other Drugs) recently received authorized funding for three military programs. Purple Star Program will be implemented in 25 schools in NH. Ask the Question: Ask, Link, Collaborate Technical Assistance Program will provide services to 40 SUD providers to operationalize how they are identifying and serving military-connected patients. A Wellness for Service Members & Families program will also be available to NH residents. Childcare is now available through the YMCA for drill weekends to families who need it.

On 5/20, high school students joining the military will be celebrated at Fisher Cats Stadium.

On 7/8 Swim With A Mission will host their annual fundraising event on Newfound Lake.

Dept of Military Affairs & Veterans Services continued--Warren Perry

Warren shared a slide showing how the Department is coordinating efforts in the areas of People, Culture, Infrastructure and Communication. In the coming year, he will be working with partners to clean up the definition of “veteran” is all RSAs. DMAVS has a Community Calendar on its website where events & activities at partner organizations are being highlighted. Check it out for events taking place or send in a request to have your event posted there.

A. Division of Veterans Services

320 appts/month pre-COVID; 164 appts/month has been pandemic low and 225 appts/mo is average occurring now. There are many appeal hearings on the docket.

B. NH State Veterans Cemetery

DMAVS will also be establishing a savings account for the cemetery for when it's full and no longer has revenue, but there remains the need to operate and maintain the grounds.

Memorial Day ceremony will take place in-person at cemetery on 5/30. It will also kick off 100 Nights of Remembrance.

C. Division of Community Based Military Programs

Nothing additional to add—see updates re: Veteran-Friendly Business Recognition Program and Family Initiatives.

VA Updates (Manchester)—Kevin Forrest

The Portsmouth CBOC was re-opened today. Spouses and caregivers are being vaccinated as they come with Veterans to receive the vaccine. An outreach clinic will be conducted at Nashua High School. Some people have cancelled vaccine appointments because they prefer to wait for the J&J vaccine to be ready again. By May, Kevin anticipates outreach clinics for vaccine will end as there are not enough attending to keep them open much longer. Kevin will be looking at how to manage the vaccine supply efficiently in the future months. There have been several new hires in various departments at Manchester VAMC. Manchester VAMC will be hosting a Zero Suicide Academy on May 12-13 for community providers. Manchester VAMC is the first VAMC in the nation to adopt the Zero Suicide framework to address suicide and the first to host an Academy.

VA Updates (White River Junction, VT)—Dr. Becky Rhoads

WRJ VAMC continues to administer vaccines. There was a pause on the J&J vaccine, but they continued to administer Moderna. A large clinic was held prior to the pause—many caregivers—and a lot of outreach has been done since the clinic to check on those who received J&J vaccine. Clinics will be held at the Medical Center and in the community. The CBOCs are back to taking walk-in appointments. They are trying to bring back in people who have not been seen in-person in the past year. Kevin informed MLT members that the NH CVEB created the Protzmann Award and nominations are due by 5/15. The award will be given to individuals and organizations. Get more info at NHCares.org.

Question: Will Manchester VAMC be moving forward with naming the Women's Clinic in honor of a female Veteran?

A: Yes. Kevin passed along the suggestion of naming the clinic after Ret. Lt. Col. Stephanie Riley who inspired NH's Ask the Question Campaign. At the end of next year they will break ground and the building will be completed in 2-3 years.

VBA Update—Brad Mayes

VBA is open for appointments. They are seeing 4-5 Veterans per day walk in for appointments in Manchester. They are working to support video hearings. The Travel Board will begin again in 4th quarter. In-person hearings are not currently being held because hearing rooms are too small. They are exploring possibilities for re-opening.

115 days = average to open claim; 155 days is average pending

Moving towards contracting disability exams because there are more providers available that way. In 2020, 1 million exams were done by providers and in 2021, so far 740,000 have been completed. Need to increase provider capacity to get Veterans examined so can adjudicate the disability claims.

There was a change in the past month to the 48 month rule. 48 combined months are available to use GI Bill benefits. If VRE benefits are used first and exhausted, then GI Bill benefits can be used. If GI Bill benefits are used first & exhausted, then it counts against the VRE entitlement. VBA would like to promote this to those using the benefits in order to maximize the benefits Veterans can utilize. Brad will send more info.

Recruiting VRE Counselors at White River Junction and a HR Coordinator for the Manchester office. Brad announced that he is retiring as of August 31st. He expects Ena Lima to attend MLT in his place after 8/31/21.

Member Updates & Announcements--

- **Steve Ahnen, NH Hospital Association**— NHHA members continue to focus on pandemic outcomes and vaccine distribution. There has been a lot of collaboration between the VA and NHHA members that has resulted in positive outcomes for the community. Numbers have increased slightly over the past few weeks, so caution is still warranted. NHHA promoted the Zero Suicide Academy through their member network and will do the same for the ATQ technical assistance program when it is time.
- **Pam Szacik, NHES**— Unemployment continues to be the main focus at NHES. They answered 10,000 calls last week to the call center. NHES is hosting virtual job fairs, but there is still no work requirement with NH, but that will be changing soon. Individual appointments continue to be virtual. Pam reminded members that she will be retiring as of April 30th and today is her last meeting. Sarah Morrissey is expected to replace her as the new Director.
- **Margaret LaBrecque, NH Veterans Home**—COVID community spread has decreased, so NHVH started admissions again and admitted five new residents in the past week. Visits with families are happening in designated areas. NHVH is actively recruiting RNs and LNAs.
- **Pete Burdett, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army**—There has been a nomination for the next Secretary of the Army and, if approved, she will be the first female Secretary of the Army in United States history. Pete will be attending the AUSA event in Washington DC this year.
- **Jim Adams, NH State Veterans Council**—The Council continues to communicate with Veterans in New Hampshire. There continues to be outstanding feedback for the VA's distribution and administering of the vaccine.
- **Jason Grower, Dead River Company**—Dead River Company will begin advertising and recruiting for employees in areas such as Virginia where service members are preparing to leave the military and return to civilian life.
- **Paul Lloyd, SVAC**—The VFW received a donation of 15,000 masks and has already distributed 6,000. Let Paul know if your organization needs any.
- **Jeffrey Newman, Department of Education**—Jeff is collaborating with Bill Gaudreau to put together an Info Session Town Hall for Veterans on Education benefits that can be used at colleges.

VI. Next Steps

Next meeting date—**Monday, June 21, 2021; 10am-11:30am***

Location: Webex Virtual Meeting

***The time of the MLT meeting will be 10am-11:30am for all future meetings.**