

New Hampshire Military Leadership Team

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

March 26, 2024

10:00am – 11:30am

Location: New Hampshire Veterans Home
139 Winter Street, Tilton, NH 03276

New Hampshire Military Leadership Team Attendance

A	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
A	Brenton Fraser, Director, Community Based Military Programs, NH DMAVS; MLT Facilitator
X	Jim Adams, Chair, NH State Veterans Council
A	Steve Ahnen, President, NH Hospital Association
X	Matt Albuquerque, Next Step Bionics and Prosthetics
X	Amy Cook, Representative for Community Behavioral Health
X	Madeline Dreusicke, NH State Veterans Council
A	Brendan Finn, NH State Veterans Council
A	William Gaudreau, Director, Division of Veteran Services, NH DMAVS
A	Jason Grower, Business Community
X	Karen Hebert, Director, Division of Economic and Housing Stability, DHHS
X	Ena Lima, Director, VA Regional Benefits Offices in MA, NH & VT
X	Paul Lloyd, Chair, State Veterans Advisory Committee
X	Kim MacKay, Commandant, NH Veterans Home
X	Sarah Morrissey, Employment Service Bureau Director, NH Employment Security
A	Ron Corsetti, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army
A	Vacant, State Approving Agency, Office of Career School Licensing for U.S. Dept. VA
A	Dr. Brett Rusch, Director, WRJ VA Medical Center
A	Roger Sevigny, NH Veterans Council
X	Lee Mulcahey, Family Programs Director, 99 th RSC Family Rep and Veteran Advocate
Guests In Attendance	
X	Brian Baker, Chief Operating Officer, NH Veterans Home
X	Jenny Stillman, APRN-Psych and Doctoral Candidate, NH Veterans Home
X	Heather Smith, Grants and Resource Development Coordinator, CBMP, NH DMAVS

Meeting Minutes

I. Welcome and Veterans Home Overview

Deputy Adjutant General, Mr. Warren Perry opened the meeting and expressed gratitude to Commandant, Ms. Kimberly MacKay of the NH Veterans Home for hosting today's MLT meeting.

Ms. MacKay welcomed the MLT to the Veterans Home and provided information as to its history, established in 1890 as the New Hampshire Old Soldiers' Home, governed by a Board of Managers including representation by several Veteran organizations to include Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, VFW Auxiliary, DAV, DMAVS and two NHVH residents.

NHVH staff philosophy of "We work in their home" offers optimal quality of life for Veteran residents as an intermediate, long term care facility offering a broad range of residential, medical, and nursing care. NHVH capacity is 250 beds, and is home for 130 Veteran residents, 119 male and 11 female Veterans. The youngest resident is a 63-year-old Gulf War Veteran and the oldest are two WW II Veterans at 99 years old. Most

Veterans that reside at the facility are from the Viet Nam War era. The Life Enhancement Unit consists of 50 beds for residents needing dementia or memory care. Currently there is a waiting list for traditional nursing care beds. Mr. Albuquerque asked whether the wait list is due to a shortage of nursing care. Ms. MacKay confirmed that NHVH would allow for more residents with increased staffing currently there is 45% nursing staff vacancy and 42% residential bed vacancy. Medicaid requires a minimum standard of 2.5 hours of care per resident per day and NHVH provides approximately 4.5 hours of care with the industry gold standard set at 5.0 hours. To address this staffing shortage there is a LNA program offering one year of free training with employment commitment and utilizing visiting nurses to fully staff second shift care. Construction has commenced for a unit with private rooms and private bathrooms to improve residents quality of life. Ms. MacKay shared that 40-45 End of Life Celebrations occur per year. This final salute by family members and fellow residents allows the resident to pass through the same front door they arrived through with final words, American Flag given to the family and Taps with call to attention. Ms. Dreusicke stated that this a moving ceremony that should be experience with the passing of Veterans in all NH hospitals.

II. Review of Last Meeting Minutes

9 January 2024 minutes were reviewed and approved. The January minutes can be found on the DMAVS—MLT website page: <https://www.dmavs.nh.gov/about-us/councils-and-committees/nh-military-leadership-team>.

III. MLT Initiative Status Updates

Mr. Perry stated that Mr. Fraser is recovering from recent surgery at his home and sends his regards. He is doing well post-procedure and looks forward to seeing all at the next MLT meeting.

A. NH Veterans Access to Oral Health Care

Mr. Perry shared a handout outlining the genesis of NH Veteran access to oral health care in the north country due to efforts by Grafton Country Representative Linda Massimilla and a minimal budget of \$10K for Veterans that cannot pay out of pocket and do not have insurance. This effort spearheaded a collaboration with DMAVS, Northeast Delta Dental, DHHS and VA and other stakeholders in the dental community to develop a solution modeled after efforts by the States of Maine and Vermont Veterans Services. Mr. Raffio of NE DD has pledged \$300K for NH Veterans dental care. Qualifying language for qualification for benefits is being drafted utilizing Maine and Vermont's eligibility rules to include Veteran must have a NH ID or driver's license, not have access to dental insurance, is not 100% service-connected for dental care through VA, has a discharge status of honorable or general under honorable conditions, and cannot afford to pay out of pocket. Covered dental services will include cleanings, x-rays and extractions. Mr. Raffio and ESG are developing a one-page flyer to raise awareness of the available buckets of oral health care for Veterans in NH. Not all buckets are for Veterans only, for example NHTI Dental Hygiene Clinic provides services performed by its clinical students supervised by a licensed dentist at a reduced cost throughout the college semester. Mr. Perry recognized the evolution of Rep Massimilla's efforts in the north country by Mr. Fraser and Mr. Raffio to a statewide effort for NH Veterans oral health care.

B. "Ask the Question" Program

Mr. Perry provided an overview of next steps as to "Ask the Question" in New Hampshire with a handout identifying 14 domains of engagement: Healthcare & Medical Services; Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Services; Oral Health Care; Social Services; Aging and Senior Services; Women's Services and Crisis Centers; Housing & Homelessness Services; Employment & Vocational Services; Law Enforcement & First Responders; Higher Education & Adult Learning; Children Services & School Systems; Faith Based Groups; Legal & Advocacy Services; Transportation and the need to identify Veterans not only in hospitals, but across various sectors. Each domain would identify their actionable objectives and defined solution/outcomes as to identifying Veterans and addressing their needs. Key components will be identified and shared through a communication marketing strategy of outreach utilizing DMAVS contract with Broadreach Public Relations.

C. Testimony 12 Feb NH House State & Federal Relations & Veterans Affairs Committee

Ms. Cook, Suicide Prevention Coordinator NAMI NH, chair of NH Suicide Prevention Council, co-chair NH SPC Military & Veteran Subcommittee provided joint testimony in conjunction with Justin Moeling Community Engagement Partnership Coordinator Manchester VA, co-chair NH SPC Military & Veteran Subcommittee to the NH House State & Federal Relations & Veterans Affairs Committee in February as to suicide prevention efforts in NH, encouraging Veterans to seek services within their communities and using ATQ to identify Veterans to Veteran appropriate resources. Included in the testimony were other state's initiatives to include Connecticut legislatively mandating ATQ in hospitals which requires to ATQ and if the question is yes, the hospital staff hand delivers a military/Veteran resource guide similar to DMAVS/NHES Veteran resource guide. Ms. Cook remarked that NH owes their Veterans more than the current grassroots efforts by implementing sustainable funding and supporters to continue efforts started by individuals. Mr. Perry stated that the MLT should identify military/Veteran priorities that should be codified into law (i.e. dental care) to operationalize efforts statewide.

D. NAMI NH – How to better serve military/Veteran families

Ms. Cook stated NAMI NH is creating strategic planning for services/resources that would be most beneficial to military/Veterans. Currently NAMI offers peer to peer support services and suicide prevention training (pre and post intervention). There is a private Facebook page for military families which is currently on pause as the person that maintained the page is no longer working at NAMI. In addition to working for NAMI, Ms. Cook is the chair of the NH Suicide Prevention Council and requested input as they are reviewing and updating the RSAs that govern the council. She is also a co-chair of the NH SPC Military and Veteran Sub-committee.

E. Legislative Update

HB 229 (defend the guard) crossed into the senate
HB 1190 (interstate social work licensing compact) passed on the house floor
HB 1382 (special education support to military students) passed on the house floor
HB 1385 (Veterans licensing acceleration program) passed on the house floor

Ms. Hebert informed MLT as to HB 1056 (relative to child daycare licensing) as it adds provisions to allow children to remain in daycare in excess of 13 hours per day on weekends for parents or guardians deployed during the weekend by the military.

IV. Old Business

None

V. New Business

MLT members discussed utilizing momentum with the House 50 Veterans in 5 months housing campaign, Veteran Dental Care Initiative and State of NH Care Coordination Initiative to establish permanent solutions to assist military/Veterans. Tailored solutions should be based upon military/Veteran needs. Legislation is a means to expand beyond current grassroots efforts with sustainable funding and supporters.

VI. Information Briefs

A. VA Medical Centers – Mr. Forrest

Veterans Affairs expanded PACT Act eligibility on March 5 allowing qualifying Veterans to directly enroll into VA healthcare. During the period of August 2023-February 2024 the VA system enrolled 1850 new patients. The Deputy Secretary of the VA hosted a panel of Medal of Honor recipients including NH's Army Staff Sgt. Ryan Pitts. Manchester VA Radiology Imaging Suite hosted an open house on March 28th. Efforts with the Care Navigator Program at Catholic Medical Center and Elliot Hospital allowed for 80% of Veterans to have coordinated care prior to their discharge from the hospital. Groundbreaking will be occurring for the new Manchester VA Women's Health Center. Mr. Perry supports the dedication and naming the center for COL Stephanie Riley of the NH National Guard.

Current staffing levels are 1065 employees, the current budget is flatlined not allowing for additional hiring. The VA is engaging Veterans via direct engagement of available services at VA and commitment is focused on providing primary care and mental health services. New mental health patients may expect a 40 day wait time for non-crisis appointments. Established patients have a 10 day wait time with a goal of all care to be provided within 20 days.

Mr. Forrest will be out of pocket mid-April to mid-May with Julie Vose will be POC during this time.

B. VBA

Ms. Lima reported one million VBA claims filed since the start of the PACT Act. Currently claims take approximately 156 days to complete as there is an increase in backlog and reduction in hiring due to budgeting. Renovations continue at the Manchester site.

C. DHHS

Ms. Hebert stated that progress continues with the Closed Loop Referral and Care Coordination Initiative to connect military/Veterans with services and resources to optimize overall well-being. Providers and coordinators of care will work through a system of care providing referrals and viewing the referrals progress in a software platform to be developed with HIPPA compliant patient consent. This solution will cover all social determinants of health to improve quality of life, as well as medical/mental health for NH residents.

D. DMAVS

The Division of Veterans Services current time frame for processing claims is 144 days. A new Veteran Services Officer will be coming on board to assist with current demand. Currently 1/3 of the nation's Veterans have financial issues due to the current economy so many are seeking VSO services.

The NH State Veterans Cemetery has obtained funding and will begin with its expansion increasing the capacity of its columbarium by 6,000. Mr. Lloyd shared that the Cemetery would hold its Memorial Day remembrance ceremony on May 30th.

E. NH Veterans Home

Ms. MacKay stated that the Veterans Home has increased access for residents healthcare through the Cleland-Dole Memorial Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act. Capital projects are continuing.

Ms. MacKay shared news of the passing of Barry Conway, (ret.) Commandant of NH Veterans Home on March 23rd. Services will be held at the NH State Veterans Cemetery on May 9th at 11:00am. [Barry Conway Obituary - Sarasota, FL \(dignitymemorial.com\)](#)

F. NH Hospital Association

None

VII. Member Updates/Announcements

Ms. Morrissey announced that NH Employment Security and DMAVS are partnering to host "NH Veterans Virtual Hiring and Resource Fair" on April 25th 3:30-5:30pm. This Veteran focused virtual job fair requires pre-registration and currently 17 job seekers and 19 employers already enrolled to participate. [NH Veterans Virtual Hiring and Resource Fair - NHES Job Database](#)

Mr. Lloyd announced his last meeting as SVAC chair will be in June and there after no longer be attending in the role of chair of SVAC at future MLT meetings.

VIII. Next Meeting

Tuesday, June 25th 1000-1130

Location: TBD