

New Hampshire Military Leadership Team

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

19 August 2020

9:00am – 11:00am

Webex Virtual Platform

New Hampshire Military Leadership Team Attendance

A	Major General David Mikolaities
A	Jim Adams, NH State Office of Veterans Services (Chair, 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	Amy Cook, Administrator, Community Based Military Programs, NH DHHS
A	William Gaudreau, Director, NH Office of Veteran Services
X	Paul Lloyd, Chair, State Veterans Advisory Committee
A	Margaret LaBrecque, Commandant, NH Veterans Home
X	Bradley Mayes, Director, VA Regional Benefits Offices in MA, NH & VT
X	Kevin Forrest, Acting Director, Manchester VA Medical Center
X	Paul Lloyd, Chair, State Veterans Advisory Committee
X	Ginger Munson, Family Representative
A	Jeffrey Newman, Administrator, Division of Higher Education, NH Department of Education
X	Warren Perry, Deputy Adjutant General, NH National Guard
A	Dr. Brett Rusch, Director, WRJ VA Medical Center
A	Roger Sevigny, NH Veterans Council
X	Pam Szacik, Employment Service Bureau Director, NH Employment Security
GUESTS IN ATTENDANCE:	
X	Corey Beem, Manchester VAMC
X	Ena Lima, Assistant Director, VA Regional Benefit Offices
X	Vanessa Stafford, NH Hospital Association

Meeting Minutes

I. Welcome

Introductions were completed and the agenda was reviewed.

- II. Review of June Minutes**—Matt Albuquerque moved to accept the minutes as written. Steve Ahnen 2nd, all members approved.

III. Old Business

MLT Tri-fold Brochure—Amy Cook

Time to update with any necessary revisions. Please review the tri-fold brochure and notify Amy Cook about any changes necessary. Kevin stated that he believed there should be some changes made to the VA portion—he will speak with Dr. Rusch and they will submit the necessary revisions.

Veteran-Friendly Business Recognition Program Update—Amy Cook

Applications have been received, but it appears COVID has definitely impacted submissions. Discussion took place regarding deadline—it will be extended to 9/30 to accommodate businesses that want the opportunity, but have not had the time this summer. Deadline for logo contest is 10/2.

Please share with your networks. The coming year will be spent engaging the Veteran-Friendly businesses and collecting feedback on what they would like to see in the future.

Suicide Prevention letter to Veterans—Warren Perry

Awaiting more information about when the letter will be signed—he will notify all those involved when he receives confirmation.

Virtual Living Room—Paul Lloyd

The Berlin VFW expressed interest in possibly hosting a Virtual Living Room and several meetings have taken place so far to explore this possibility. The next step is for the exploratory group to meet in Berlin and talk further about the physical needs of the space—concern about accessibility. Logistics regarding the broadband availability and the VA funding are also being explored. More information to come.

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

Ginger and Amy have met a few times to discuss ideas, possibilities and necessary collaborations. They are in the process of further exploring an idea sparked by June's MLT meeting—how technology can better connect military spouses/families. They will be meeting with an organization in Texas that has designed and implemented an innovative and successful program to do this in order to hear more about how they designed the program, its outcomes, and the resources required to maintain it. More information to come.

IV. New Business

CARES Act Funding—Warren Perry

DMAVS is in the process of reviewing and awards \$3 million in CARES Act funding for Veterans Service Organizations and also non-profit organizations that provide traditional services to Veterans. Approximately 50 applications and each will receive approximately 50% of their requested need.

House Bill 1582—Warren Perry

Passed the Senate 23-1 vote and includes a Veterans Bill of Rights. Specifically, the Bill ensures free state college tuition as of 7/1/21 for children of NH Veterans with 100% permanent & total disability rating from VA. It also creates three new positions for the Division of Community Based Military Programs; however, wording was included in the Bill stating that the Department is not responsible until the Bill is funded. At this time, there does not appear to be a path forward for funding in the near future.

V. Information Briefs

Dept of Military Affairs & Veterans Services Update—Warren Perry

i. Division of Community Based Military Programs

Together With Veterans continues to move forward in the Lakes Region. They've received enough interest from Veterans in the community who are willing to invest time and help with the initiative. They've developed a Steering Committee and will be having a virtual orientation from the team in Colorado next week.

ii. Division of Veterans Services

VSOs continue to work remotely. Appointments continue to be down, but were higher than the previous month. No degradation in capabilities to meet typical needs. Appeal hearings have all been postponed since March.

iii. NH State Veterans Cemetery

Starting to make up for lost time with burials. 130 interred in July (about 6/day) which is very high. Restrictions have been lifted, but masks are required.

VA Updates (Manchester)—Kevin Forrest

VAMC-Manchester hosted a virtual Veteran Town Hall last week—250 attended. Julie Voss has been filling role of Acting Associate Director. Applications for Associate Director positions are being reviewed presently. Questions have arisen about COVID testing at the VA sites—testing is done only for treatment purposes or prior to surgery. The VA does not perform non-symptomatic testing for surveillance purposes. All CBOCs except Portsmouth have been open for past month, still determining how to re-open Portsmouth. Appointments & masks are required. Screening is being performed on 100% of all those entering (staff & patients). Hiring new staff to perform screening as it appears this will be a long-term need. Virtual telehealth services continued to go well. New VA refill app available. Opened the Wellness Center at the Brady Sullivan Building in Manchester—Tues/Thurs walk-in services. Community Living Center started family visits in the courtyard. 1st round of flu shots will be available first week of September. Patient Advocates are full staffed.

VBA Update—Brad Mayes

Operational status—open for business; requested approval to move into Phase 1 of re-opening and received approval; received approval for Phase 2 on 8/7 so all three offices will be move up to 50% of the workforce returning to on-site services. Can now meet with Veterans. Majority of employees continue to work remotely. VBA continuing to process claims, but not seeing as many Veterans this summer as in months past; however, numbers are up from 2019. Exams are mostly what has slowed down since they weren't able to take place. Across 3 states, only 1 employee tested + for COVID and he has since recovered. Appeals docket expected to open in October with lots of safety measures in place. Leveraging VideoConnect and virtual technology as available. Recently signed MOU with WRJ-VA and Burlington Vet Center so a Counselor can be put into the Vet Center. Currently seeking a qualified candidate.

Member Updates & Announcements

Pete Burdett—Next SVAC meeting is 9/1/20 via Zoom at 5pm. Continues to be a hard time for all military branches to recruit because of the lack of schools being open during the past months.

Steve Ahnen—NH Hospital Association has helped to facilitate issues between hospitals and VA recently. They are moving in a positive direction with a new provide (Optum). New claims are being paid on a timely basis, so still working through legacy claims. Teams at the local, regional and national levels have come together to solve this problem and progress is being made.

Pam Szacik—NH Employment Security sites are still closed to the public, but appointments are being held through Zoom or over the phone. They are currently revamping services—how will NHES provide services in the future? The COVID experience has opened a door for new service-delivery formats. Re-employment services will be starting 10/1. Workshops will be recorded and made available on the internet. Many new programs are available due to COVID.

Matt Albuquerque—Next Step Bionics never closed despite COVID. A lot of positive feedback has been shared regarding virtual telehealth services for Veterans.

VI. Next Steps

Next meeting date—TBA

Plan on another virtual meeting in October or early November, but it will be confirmed.

Accompanying document: Military Leadership Team Tri-fold Brochure for review and revisions