

ND Cares Coalition Meeting Minutes

March 7, 2024

Chair Shelly Sizer opened the meeting. There were 25 people in attendance.

LTC Jay Sheldon, NDNG Policy and Legislative Liaison talked about the Military Working Group which is a multi-state agency effort to change policy and procedures to make ND the most military-friendly state. Task Force MIND (Military Issues in North Dakota) will become an official committee working on issues that may require legislative changes. They are made up of community leaders and military installations and legislatures.

Pam Sagness reported that A-Vel Care will expand mobile crisis services to more of the state – starting in the Southwest, Region 8. Dickinson will not participate as they have a close working relationship with the local Human Service Center. They are expanding into region 1,2,3. They are also expanding telehealth psychiatry services to all jails in North Dakota. Appointments are scheduled within 1-2 days. The transition of Human Service Centers (HSC) to Community Behavioral Health Centers is progressing – starting in Minot. There will be a veteran focus. Other HSCs are doing a self -assessment to determine which one will be next.

BG Jackie Huber reported on MG Hokenson's visit to Fargo. 200 people on deployment for the Army and a few individual deployment for the Air Guard. Battery B in Grand Forks and the DET 7 out of Bismarck are both in the CENTCOM area and the 817th Engineer Co on the southwest border. Unfortunately, the Guard had their first had a suicide in a while and other unforeseen death. Kora Dockter asked for names of survivors so the ND Suicide Prevention Coalition can reach out to them. They are celebrating 20 years I partnership with Ghana and 10 year with Togo and Benin.

Amy Ruff from the NDNG Risk Reduction team reported they are continuing to work programs focusing on the five pillars of health (spiritual, family, social, psychological, physical). There has been lots of postvention support within the Guard as a result of the suicide and other deaths. The Guard has a small team working on how they can support the Governor's proclamation. There was over \$10K that military families saved by utilizing the DUI and substance use seminars the Guard offers that are licensed by the NDHHS.

Carlotta McCleary from Mental Health America is working on navigation services to help people find services and peer support – this may include transportation and food. They are organizing the Consumer Family Network Conference for the spring. They continue to provide parent to parent peer support for those with children with mental health needs. Carlotta mentioned that they will restart their podcast series when they find more funding. Lastly, they will launch a new website where people can find mental health screenings and instructions about where to find help if needed. MHAN.org MHAND.org are their websites.

Katie Fitzimmons from the ND University System Chancellors' Office reported that they just completed a system-wide survey called American College Health Associations National College Health Assessment and should be receiving data in the next couple of weeks. Among other things this survey included mental health, suicidality questions and firearms. She plans to bring the results to the next Interim Judiciary Committee meeting where they are looking to extend 2nd Amendment right to carry public spaces like university campuses. There have also been a couple of suicides on campus this year. They are also seeing more use of drugs on campus and a large ramp up of mental health services before spring break.

Summer Hanson of the Fargo VA talked about expansion of PACT Act eligibility that went live March 5th. The exposures they are looking at are air pollutants, chemicals, occupational hazards, radiation and warfare agents and specific service dates and specific operations. Must have served 24 months or for the entire time they were called to active duty. Michelle will work with the VA to update the wording of the PACT ACT ad that is currently running.

Paula from the Fargo VBA stated that they will be joining VHA in any mental health outreach activities going on throughout the state they year and to please contact her with any events that need assistance.

Jennifer Illicit from FirstLink is working to increase partnerships with 911 throughout the state to route appropriate calls to 988. They started a pilot in Fargo/Moorehead what is going very well and other cities are interested in partnering in the same way. The Annual Breakfast is May 1st at the Hilton Garden Inn in Fargo. Dr. Jill Nelson will speak on compassion and connection.

Marian Jordan of Military OneSource talked about Mil Tax software that will allow users to file up to 3 state taxes returns and one federal returns. There are also year-round tax consultants available. They also just launched a community resource finder citing the fact that DOD is worried about food insecurity for some families.

Kelly Weiland of Military Outreach talked about Vietnam Veterans event in Belcourt on the 15th and one at the Armed Forces Reserve Center on the 29th. The League of cities conference is in Minot. On April 25-26 the National Guard will hold a retiree weekend. May 11 will be the Military Women's Symposium and a Veterans Suicide Prevention Summit Sept. 30.

Sarah Kemp Tabbutt from the Fargo VA talked about the Governor's Challenge priority group #3. For fiscal year 2024 they have distributed over 1500 gun locks, trained 84 people on CALM with upcoming training in June and September. The University of Jamestown provides the CEUS. They are creating a flyer of myths and facts sheets about firearms and mental health and providing information for tables at gun shows. AFSP will be providing Lethal Means Safety presentations to Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever. Lastly, efforts are underway to work with school counselors for training.

Kora Dockter of ND Suicide Prevention Coalition talked about their new website and the annual conference. They will start with ACES and internet education for parents to keep their kids safe online, construction worker suicidality and elder suicide/internet scams. They are working on funding for a special media campaign targeting young men. The Hope Café is up and running with bi-monthly meetings and occasional speakers. Lastly, they are looking for families with have a suicide loss to send letters to and for people willing to write letters.

Laurel Grams from Minot Air Force Base is the Director for the integrated primary prevention workforce. The base has struggled with a few suicides in recent months. Recommendations for prevention created a comprehensive plan of support. They are also using a home growth prevention annual training program specific to Minot that includes soft skills and the web-based program Kahoot.

Pam Mack with Protection and Advocacy introduced Mary Anderson who will be participating with ND Cares in place of Pam. They are seeing more reports of suspected financial exploitation of veterans and their benefits, trust funds and lump sum monies, conservatorships. They are seeing a lot more behavioral health issues with children of the deployed and working with schools to get the services the children need. A new project is looking for ways to use cutting edge assistive technologies in the state – possibly even creating new technologies. There is a pilot of four individuals to do a needs assessment for new technology. This will help provide greater independence for disabled people. She also mentioned all the new hires at P&A.

Nikki Frohlich of Military Outreach stated there is a Vietnam Veterans Celebration on the 29th at the Amvets in Bismark, the Hidden Wounds Overpass May 16, and the Central North Dakota Stand Down in Bismarck Aug 22nd.

Todd Remington of the Bismarck Vet Center reported that he will be supporting as many veterans' events as possible with the Mobile Vet Center. Fargo just received a new mobile unit. They will both support the Hidden Wounds Overpass event. Please reach out with any requests.

Jesse Rheault from the Fargo VA, talked about several topics. General patient census has been high and often can get an appointment quicker than the private sector. They are expanding hiring staff including in the areas of cardiology, pulmonology, oncology, radiology. Mental health needs are expanding and so are their staffing needs. Dr. XXX is now the Chief of Staff now they are looking for a chief of Surgery. Budget spending has increase is pharmacy, community care and wages so they are being careful expenditures for the rest of the fiscal year. The new mental health outpatient facility is being reworked as the actual costs appear to be more the double the VA budget estimate. The deals for the two parcels of land for the Fisher House fell

through so the VA is back to square one. The VA is now CARF accredited for 3 years with zero citations. They have been designed as a Level II Age-Friendly facility. The emergency department won the Guardian of Excellence award (3rd year) and their quality metrics among veterans remains high.

Sara Blazek from Survivor Outreach Services reported that Gold Star Families have been invited to the Vietnam Veterans Welcome Home Luncheon. There will be the Wish You Were Here (motorcycle) Ride – For Suicide Prevention will be June 14-18. The VFW Devil's Lake 14K Run/Walk is June 1st and Remembrance weekend for surviving families is July 26-28 in Bismarck.

Shyla Wesson from Service Members Family Support Centers reported that they hope to hire a new person in Grand Forks. The new Child and Youth Coordinator started on Monday.

Michelle Panos of ND Cares reported that the University of Jamestown will become an ND Cares Business Partner sometime this year bringing the total to 26. The number of communities is 58. She then discussed the statics on the Governor's Challenge efforts such as applying for the Fox grant for an Ask the Question campaign, the Suicide Mortality Review Academy work of the state commission, suicide statistics for 2023, calls to 988 by veterans (114 in Jan), 545 gun locks had been distributed, 32 people have taken STAR behavioral health training, 84 people have taken live a S.A.V.E training and 24 civilian peer supports are trained in military culture. For veteran peer support recruitment ,we have two informational seminars plan planned for April. She also discussed the ND Cares budget and donations and the various advertisements currently airing using the ND Broadcasters Association contract. She thanked VA PIO Shawn Abbas for providing b-roll for the Compact Act ad. She talked about preparations for the Hidden Wounds Overpass.

The next Coalition Meeting is June 6 and the next Executive Committee Meeting is April 4.