**ND Cares Coalition Virtual Meeting Minutes
November 5, 2020**

The purpose: Learn about the messaging coalition partners have implemented or will implement to reduce stigma for service members, veterans, their families and survivors, then formulate an action plan outline to fill any gaps identified.

Members in attendance: Connie Sprynczynatyk, Cindy Whitesell, Davina French, David Becker,
Nichol Berman, Jerome Phillips, Dr. Brent Weintraub, Dick Dever, Kora Dockter, Kati Fitzsimmons,
Shawn Flemmer, Nichol Frohlich, Michelle Panos, Summer Hanson, Paula Heitmann, Jackie Huber,

John Jeziorske, Carlotta McCLeary, Cindy Miller, Rebecca Quinn, Pam Sagness, Kirby Schmidtgall, Ann Stark, Allison Trainor, Kelli Weiand, Tim Wicks, Erica Davidson, Amy Ruff, Sarah Kemp Tabbut.

Chair Connie Sprynczynatyk opened the meeting with a welcome, a roll call of the attending coalition members and Michelle Panos introduced Jacy Voglewede as the facilitator of the meeting.

Jacy explained how Teams Jamboard operated then played a video from 2009 of military service members talking about the barrier of stigma to getting help. After viewing the video, it was obvious that the same effects of stigma still exists and we need to do a better job dispelling it.

Next coalition members provided input through Jamboard on the question, “What is your organization currently doing, or plan to do, to reduce stigma?

Sarah Kemp of the VA talked about her work providing technical assistance with suicide autopsy, coordinate mental health care, reducing stigma within primary care. Kora Dockter of the North Dakota Suicide Prevention Coalition talking about working to change the language used when speaking about suicide as they give presentation and talks to small groups. – died by suicide not “committed” suicide. Minot AFB is considering implementing the Mental Health First Aid course. Peer support programs are coming on-line from the Department of Human Services.

On the question of, “What observations have you seen in your community in terms of stigma?” members provided their input through Jamboard. John Jeziorske of the Air Force stated that they are working through the sigma that people view themselves as weak when they are temporarily removed from their primary job to take care of themselves – letting the team down. Paula from the VA stated that although VA staff is trained on suicide prevention, having open conversations is still difficult. The VA is working to help those conversations. She also reminded everyone the new 988 suicide hotline will come on line in 2022 and coalition members should incorporate it into their messaging when appropriate. Cindy Miller of First Link stated that we should wait until all the phone companies are on board with 988.

When asked about examples of stereotyping, members responded with “you didn’t come from a good family”; “addiction is not a disease”; “cannot do your job successfully”; “deal with mental health on your own”; “you must be a bad person”; “I don’t want to be labeled crazy and put in the state hospital”; “all veterans have PTDS or are on the edge of a breakdown”; “you are just seeking attention and will not go through with suicide”; “you can never recover from addiction.”

Next, members were asked about their knowledge of anti-stigma campaigns that have worked from other states or organizations. Connie stated that she would like to cut through the clutter of messaging. Some of responses included the “Real Warrior” from the Army; “It’s Okay not to be Okay”; personal testimonials – real stories; Seize the Awkward Campaign, 211 Helpline; use humor to encourage people to get help (video produced for Colorado), Recovery Reinvented. Together Strong is a program that works well for military service members and veterans.

The first identified gap was the need to Promote Peer to Peer program as they come online. Partners would include BH Division, ND Cares and people within their organizations. Sharable digital and paper products could be produced that are specific to target audiences. We could measure the outcome by the number of people who took the training.

The next gap to be addressed was to identify more collaboration opportunities or platforms including professionals and communities committed to reducing sigma.

The last gap identified was that healthcare workers need more training to assist those who present with a mental health/substance use disorder need. Partners could be the Univ. of North Dakota, ND Medical Assoc./Licensing Board, reconnecting with Ret. Col Gordon Leingang MD, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention “Safeside” program. The group would assess what is already being done and if is it working, andif the ND Cares Coalition can be of assistance.

Kora mentioned that anti-stigma messaging could be highlighted at the North Dakota Suicide Prevention Coalition Awareness Event.

Connie closed the meeting at 3:20 p.m.