ND Cares Coalition Meeting Minutes

September 16, 2021

Connie opened the meeting with a roll call of coalition members. There were 27 people on the call.

Kim Hemphill from Unite Us North Dakota gave a presentation on its referral management platform.  
The company was started by two veterans who were unhappy with the care coordination they received from service providers and wanted a way for member agencies to learn the outcome of referrals made to other services on behalf of their clients. Member agencies represent a wide variety of services: healthcare, food panties, housing etc. Kim gave a brief demonstration of the platform and offered a more in depth demonstration to agency who requests one. The platform is free for non-profit agencies. Agencies not currently participating as a Unite Us North Dakota member may still receive a referral via the platform from a participating member and will be given the opportunity to join. Kim also stated the platform is HIPAA and FERPA compliant and clients must give permission to share information before a referral is made.

Pam Sagness of the Behavioral Health Division talked about two new funding opportunities for providers. One is a suicide prevention grant and the other is a recovery housing program providing funds for sober living environment. Pam is also interested in learning about ideas for some plans that providers or organizations may have already been discussing that could benefit from funds to implement it - whether it involves recovery or prevention.

Next Pam reminded everyone that there is still some funding that can be utilize to address behavioral health needs specific to COVID or other disasters. Perhaps an organization is thinking of a new program or expanding and existing one and could use some infrastructure funding.

The Behavioral Health Conference in October, at the Bismarck Civic Center, is a collaboration with the Children and Family Services Division. Both virtual and in person attendance options are available so you can sign up for either. It's a 2 day conference with an additional day of free virtual training afterwards that can be completed on one’s own time.

Lastly, Pam reported that there are still plenty of COVID-related resources on [helpishere.nd.gov](https://www.helpishere.nd.gov/) such as behavioral health prevention supports for parents, economic assistance, qualifying for food benefits or assistance with housing or rentals. There are behavioral health supports called [Reach for Resilience](https://reach4resiliencend.com/) for healthcare workers experiencing stressors. These supports are available to a broad variety of healthcare workers such emergency room physicians, direct care workers in long term care facilities or basically any emergency workers such as ambulance services.

Michelle Panos gave an overview of [H.R. 4627](https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/4627/text?r=1&s=1): Veterans Culturally Competent Act of 2021 that was introduced 7-22-21. It requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to establish standards and requirements for the provision of mental health care by non-VA providers in the Veterans Community Care Program (VCCP). The standards must be the same as the standards applicable to VA employees who provide mental health care. Non-VA mental health care providers must complete training courses on military culture, core competencies for health care professionals, suicide evaluation and management, post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, and military sexual trauma after the provider becomes approved under the VCCP.

**Coalition Updates**

Bryan Watters of the ND Dept. of Veterans Affairs reported that they are requesting funding for the Fisher House during the upcoming special legislative session.

Dr. Breton Weintraub of the Fargo VA Health Care System reported that the VA have S.A.V.E (suicide prevention) trainings open September 17th from 9:00 AM to 1030, September 21st from 1:00 to 230, and September 20, 27th from 2:30 to 4:00.

The VA is just beginning a program called Caring Contacts where veterans released from emergency department to home, receive caring messages by phone or text for up to one year. There is data to suggest that these types of contacts reduce the rate of suicide. There are approximately 30 people in the Fargo program now.

Dr. Weintraub also reported that according to the 2021 National VA Suicide Prevention Report there was a decrease in suicides by 7.2% which is the first decrease in a long time and put the number on par with 2007 rates. This is good news but there is still much work to do.

Kelli Weiand of Military Outreach reported that for October 12 she arranged for a FirstLink 101 virtual training for the Devil’s Lake Homeless Coalition, of which she is a member. On September 18, she will be in Bismarck presenting at the Yellow Ribbon Event and on September 20 she has meeting with the VSP in Montreal County concerning a future resource fair. She also plans to attend upcoming Military Affairs meetings in Devil’s Lake and Minot. Lastly Kelli stated that the 10th annual veterans stand down is October 21st in Minot.

Nikki Frohlich of Military Outreach reported that she a couple of upcoming homeless coalition and Military Affairs meetings. The Bismarck Chambers Brats for the Brave was a success again this year. She will help Kelli with the veterans stand down and she will conduct military culture training at the tribal college in New Town in November. Lastly, Kelli mentioned that she was contacted by a gentlemen from a non-profit who purchased the former Sacred Heart Monastery in Richardton who plans to use the facility to assist homeless women veterans. If anyone knows of someone who would need these services please contact Nikki for additional information.

Michelle Thomson, resilience coordinator from National Guard reported that the Guard discussed moving forward with two wellness camps a year focusing on holistic health. The Army will put forth funding in 2025 for this but ND will revamp its existing program to incorporate elements of holistic health ahead of time.

Kirby Schmidtgall of the NDNG reported that starting in October throughout FY22 the National Guard will be rolling out the Kognito: Together Strong virtual training. This peer support gatekeeper training given to all soldiers in hope of creating a significant increase on peer support capacity to effectively converse with someone dealing with a mental health issue.

Matthew McCleary of Mental Health America stated they are working on a vaccine hesitancy event and trainings with Protection and Advocacy concerning children’s issues.

Pam Mack of Protection and Advocacy reported that employment supports are need for those who lost their jobs. The educations system still resolving challenges for students with disabilities and need information with their rights. Military families that may be moving into communities and are not familiar with the educational systems and how our local control within our rural districts may happen so they need resources. P&A has also are seen quite an increase in involvement of people that have behavioral health or mental health needs or a traumatic brain injury connected to the criminal and juvenile justice system. This is concerning because those systems are not always equipped to provide for the accommodation and the recognition of the unique needs that a disability may present so they are educating judicial systems and school resources officers. Mental Health of America is providing training to law enforcement and first responders about interacting with those with a disability.

Davina French of TAPS reported that she accompanied Sara Blazek to the SOS conference to talk about fallen families from the TAPS perspective and Davina also attend a conference with Lonnie Wangen concerning a plan to service the families of veterans who died of COVID that are from the Vietnam, Korea and WWII eras.

Katie Fitzsimmons of the ND University System reported that some campuses are getting their Out of the Darkness walks coordinated. There is a bigger demand for mental health first aid training and counselors at NDSU, Valley City and BSE that are certified in the 8 hour mental health first aid course are providing the training.

A large initiative of the North Dakota Student Association this year is the Green Bandana project that is another type training on identifying needs the students that may have a mental health or behavioral health need. After being trained the student receives a green bandana that can put on their backpack, or wear, to show that there are a visible supporter of people with mental health struggles and they are a resource someone can talk to.

The Career Builders program is still up and running thanks to more support from the state legislature. It provides people with repayment programs if they earn a degree in a field of high need and stay in the state to work.

The state board is looking at readjusting their goals, metrics, and outcomes concerning mental health issues and is actively working with the community now on this topic.

Lastly, in answer to Connie’s COVID question, Katie stated that students are happy to be back in person and attending more events but COVID is still a concern for high risk students and facility. Vaccinations are encouraged and there are incentives in some parts of the state.

David Becker, Army Reserve Ambassador reported that he reapplied to extend his ambassadorship.

Joyal Meyer of the ND Department of Health reported that Cody Pinks, one of the epidemiologists, is still working on the suicide dashboard and using some fatality/circumstance data trying to look at factors that lead to suicide deaths.

There is also the 2021 Pediatric and Primary Care Behavioral Health Symposium put on by Sanford Health and the Dakota Department of Health on September 23rd. It's a free virtual event. It offers 8 credits for physicians and nurses and whoever else could benefit.

**Administrative Update**

During the administrative update Michelle Panos stated that the ND Cares Partner businesses and communities stand at 19 and 49. The town of Streeter is currently discussing joining.

The budget for the current biennium stayed the same at $130,500. ND Cares also received $2000 from the Woodruff Foundation for completing a needs assessment, which helps the foundation decide how they will spend their money next year. The total available funds from donations is currently $15,915.13.

Michelle then reported on the progress of strategic plan activities. She requested a new dataset of registered businesses from the Secretary of State’s office in order to filter the list down to only the relevant service types provided in the FirstLink resource database. Michelle also reported that she appeared on XXXX television talking about the resources available to veterans or military members who may have a difficult time coping with recent events in Afghanistan.

To further build awareness off resources ND Cares exhibited resources at the League of City Workshop and the Addiction Counselors Conference and the League of Cities annual conference is on calendar. Nikki and Kelli regularly attend events around the state.

ND Cares is also working to support peer to peer networks by continuing to promote the state’s peer support program and recently promoted the peer program of Mental Health of America.

Reporting on activities regarding the Communication Plan to Reduce Stigma, Michelle stated that the TV and radio ads featuring Steve Anderson, American Legion Department Commander are nearly finished and should air by the end of the month. In addition Michelle stated that Nikki will be conducting military culture training for the League of Cities and at the NHS Tribal College in Newtown. The Military Reference Guide is on hold until the Space Force announces its enlisted insignia which will be incorporated in the guide.

Lastly Michelle described the ongoing problem of the shortage of Tricare mental health and substance use treatment providers. While the regional Human Service Centers (HSC) are Tricare providers, they are currently only accepting clients that are severely mentally disabled – which is not the population of the National Guard. While we work increase the number of Tricare providers, the HSCs will accept guardsman if there is no Tricare provider available at the time and the guardsman cannot afford to pay. Kirby and his staff can skip the lower level intake screening process and discuss a potential patient directly with Rosalie Etherington, Superintendent over the HSCs or with the directors of each HSCs.

Talks with Tricare resulted in two outcomes. Tricare will lift the cap on the number of mental health providers it allots to North Dakota and any provider who would like to become a Tricare provider will be fast tracked. In addition, Tricare will work on updating their online provider search for accuracy and survey providers to determine which ones offer assault/domestic violence treatment services.

The next step is to work with Tricare to resolve two credentialing problems for substance use treatment providers. Tricare requires that outpatient treatment must be part of a larger inpatient treatment program with a physician on staff. Also, Tricare does not recognize that North Dakota’s licensed addiction counselors practice unsupervised. We are asking for waivers for these requirements. Tricare will take our concerns to the Defense Health Agency and also discuss a Locality Based Waiver so providers can receive non-discounted payment reimbursement. Pam Mack stated that P&A would accept a referral this situation as this kind of advocacy in in their wheelhouse.

Ann Stark of the NDNG added that the main issue has to do with the credentialing and not recognizing the credentialing of addiction counselors. What we have to make clear is the credentialing requirements for addiction counselors from state to state are not the same. Some states, for example in Virginia, one only needs 200 practice hours to become credentialed. But in North Dakota, we require 1400 practice hours before addiction counselors are licensed. We need to point that out to Tricare. Maybe they won’t recognize addiction counselors in every state, but our state is one that has a much higher requirement. In fact, ND addiction counselors’ practice hours are even higher than for example, masters level counselor practice hours in other states.

Michelle stated that if we cannot get concessions from Tricare than we may need to seek congressional delegation assistance.

Davina recommended that we could possibly reconvene the group that worked on credentialing issues in the past. Pam Mack agreed, and if necessary, we could address the issue at an interim committee meeting to help gain legislative support.

Tim Wicks will be accompanying Michelle to the ND League of Cities conference to help in the ND Cares booth.

Carmel Froemke the program director at CAP ND reported on changes to the SSVF program, that service veterans who are homeless or imminently at risk of homelessness, very low income and have active military duty service. The Shallow Subsidy Service is a new service that we will be rolling out by October first of this year. It offers rental support for up to 2 years. The veteran does not have to be re certified of income. The subsidy currently pays 35% of their HUD fair market rent or rent reasonableness, however this amount should be going up to 50%. Veterans must be able to contribute to their rent and requires light touch case management. The veteran must be enrolled in either housing prevention or rapid rehousing to qualify. The subsidy can also cover the veterans rent as well as utility assistance child care, transportation assistance deposits emergency housing moving costs and general housing stabilization needs. But it cannot be used in conjunction with another federal housing assistance.

Another requirement of the program to strategize on how to ensure that the other service providers are aware of this program. They will be talking more about it within the COC and the Medical Center and all the other veteran programs.

Chairman Connie Sprynczynatyk, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army is still waiting for the announcement of her replacement. She also reported on the 20th Anniversary of the GWOT memorial service and encouraged us to reach out to anyone we knew who was affected by the tragedy of 911.

**Upcoming events**

* **TAPS – Survivor Traditional Classroom Peer Mentor Training:** Sept. 26, Ohio
* **ND Brain Injury Network Concussion Symposium:** Sept. 17th
* **Behavioral Health Peer Support In-Person Training:** Sept. 13-17, Fargo
* **ACOVA Meeting:** Sept., 23-24, Bismarck
* **First Link ASIST Training:** Oct. 10, Fargo
* **North Central Veterans Stand Down:** Oct. 21, Minot
* **ND Behavioral Health & Children and Family Services Conference:** Oct. 26-28
* **Recovery Reinvented 2021:** October 25, Bismarck Event Center/Virtual

The next Executive Committee meeting is scheduled for October 14, 2021 and the next Coalition Meeting is December 9, 2021.

Connie closed the meeting at 3:09 pm.