

ND Cares Coalition Meeting Minutes

August 7, 2025

Shelly Sizer opened the coalition meeting at 1:00 PM, welcoming everyone and moving directly into member updates.

Amy Ruff (North Dakota Army National Guard) reported on the recent suicides of retired and currently serving service members, which is "quite out of our norm." This has led to the creation of a suicide prevention task force to examine current efforts, identify gaps, and explore improvements. The task force is co-chaired by Amy Ruff and Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Bohl, with members from various levels, including readiness NCOs, soldiers with lived experience, and subject matter experts. Amy also mentioned that the results of the task force will flow over to the Air Guard side.

Cyndi and Kelli mentioned their upcoming events, including the back-to-school backpack brigade at the Minot Air Force Base, vets in the park in Grand Forks, Nikki's stand down in Bismarck, an open house in Grand Forks, and the Veterans Summit. Cindy mentioned supporting Kelly at the State Fair and planning a meeting with the new mayor in Minot to reintroduce the ND Cares Council.

Andrea Dockendorf of the Fargo VA health care system reported on the Joint Commission Surveyors' visit and ongoing reorganization efforts. They have increased the number of vacant positions approved for backfill and are actively recruiting providers. The facility's trust scores are around 93%, exceeding the VHA average of about 91%. Construction has begun on the new mental health building (building 52), and new CBOC locations will be opening in Grand Forks and Fergus Falls. The team is currently focused on lethal means safety for Suicide Prevention Month and is offering calm facility wide to all VHA staff.

Katie Fitzsimmons of the North Dakota University system announced the annual suicide prevention meeting on Wednesday, September 24th, at the BSc Career Academy. The meeting will cover suicide prevention from ages 5 to 100 and will be available virtually.

Kora Docktor of the ND Suicide Prevention Coalition added that there would be resource booth opportunities at the suicide prevention meeting and that Michelle has found a great speaker to talk about how to help families when there's a suicide for a military member.

BG Jackie Huber of the NDNG reported on the Remembrance Weekend for Gold Star families and the National Guard bridge dedication for the Fettig family in Dickinson. The unit currently mobilized to the southwest border will be looking at demobilization activities, and the Air Guard continues to have deployments around the globe. The military Commission aims to make North Dakota one of the most military-friendly states by addressing gaps in services for service members, veterans, and families.

Jeffrey Diemert, of Legal Services of North Dakota shared a success story of helping a veteran avoid foreclosure due to medical debt and assisting other veterans with housing disputes. Their grant has been approved for another fiscal year. They regularly attend outreach events handing out 988

stickers for the suicide hotline number. He is also interested in having a table at the upcoming NDSPC conference in September.

Laurel Grams of the Prevention & Resiliency Office at Minot Air Force Base reported that the DOD gave Minot the Prevention of Excellence Award based on their annual curriculum for suicide prevention. They are dealing with some losses and working to determine the best ways forward.

LTC Ann Willoughby of the NDNG, highlighted the state family program activities, including successful camp seasons for children and youth. They had three camps this year: Fish Camp (47 kids), military adventure camp (80 kids), and steam camp (40 kids). They are also planning father-daughter balls in Devils Lake, Bismarck, and Fargo. NGB recognized North Dakota's suicide program as one of the best in the nation. September is Suicide Prevention Month, and they will start with the Out of the Darkness Walk.

Melissa Lennon, of Altru's Behavioral Health Center, introduced herself and provided an overview of the in-patient facility, which has 24 beds for adult and adolescent patients. They accept all insurances, including VA and Tricare. The facility is planning an expansion to include an additional 24 beds and a revamped intake department.

Nikki Frohlich, of Military Outreach mentioned the USO event at the Fraine Barracks, the stand down in Bismarck, a military student fair at North Dakota State University in Fargo, the Fargo stand down, and the Out of the Darkness Walk.

Ron Murray of the NDNG Integrated Primary Prevention Office is preparing a talk for the Suicide Prevention Coalition from a military veteran perspective.

Jonathan Ross reported that Lonnie submitted the Fox Grant and is planning to attend the NASDV conference in Wyoming.

Karen Stewart (of the NDNG Integrated Primary Prevention Office reported on the 90 days of prevention, which includes activities and events to build resilience and connection. They also conducted training for new recruits in identifying strengths and building healthy habits.

Sarah Kemp-Tabbut from ND HOPES gave Michelle an update via email which stated: They are filming veteran stories for release in September for Suicide Prevention Month. They will have a table at the Bakken Oil and Gas Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Summit on the 16th and will conduct CALM training Sept 10th and Safety Planning Sept. 9th. AFSP sent letters to federal firearm licensees regarding the Governor's Challenge and is following up.

Shelly Sizer announced her resignation as chair of North Dakota Cares, effective today.

Michelle Gauvin-Panos provided updates on various initiatives, including the Broadcasters Association Peps and/or some paid social media advertising for, Vets for Vets Peer Support training, Rally Point, Together with Veterans Summit, the 988 Veterans Campaign, the Compact Act, Veterans Home and the Stand Downs. She also mentioned the Star Behavior Health training and the Veteran Ready Certificate Program from PsychArmor as ongoing and is working on Clergy or

Faith-Based Training for some time in 2026 and also discuss Dashboard updates. The Tricare directory needs to be cleaned up. The Defense Health Agency may open Tricare to more licensures if access is an issue, and directory inaccuracies could confound measurements of access. North Dakota Human service centers, despite being certified, are not on the list.

The next Coalition Meeting is November 6th and the next Executive Committee meeting will be December 4th.

Shelly closed the meeting at 2:34 PM.