 **ND Cares Executive Committee Meeting Minutes**

**March 9, 2022**

Attendees Cindy Whitesell, Lonnie Wangen,

Dr. Weintraub, BG Jackie Huber, Joyal Meyer, David Becker, Davina French, Sara Blazek, Michelle Panos. (All virtual)

Absent, Shelly Sizer, Pam Sagness, LTC Ann Willoughby

**1. Opening.** Co-chair Cindy Whitesell briefly opened the meeting.

**2. Minutes.** Minutes from the January 12, 2022 meeting were accepted as written.

**3.** **Presentation:** Davina French gave a general overview of the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors and the services they provide. There are over 4900 National Guardsman in the program but that is only a small portion of the guardsman compared to the actual number of survivors. The purpose of the Memorandum of Understanding between TAPS and the National Guard Bureau is to provide to ALL survivor with free and unlimited grief support and resources. Phase I is refining processes and procedures for survivor referral, phases II A & II B deal with further refinement, training (of SOS, Casualty and Family programs) and implementation of the processes, and Phase III includes process review and specialty training (chaplains, mental health professional, youth coordinator, etc.) Phase II B will begin April of 2022. Davina stated that ND Cares will be part of the training.

**4. Old Business**

* Michelle stated the number of partner business and cities have not changed but the Williston Military Affairs Committee recommended a couple in the area.
* For the strategic plan update Michelle reported that she is working on the next issue of the Partner Update (newsletter), and the Veterans Home asked for two more ads bring the number to six. The ND Broadcasters Association has no problem with airing them all. We are waiting for the final edits.
* Regarding the Governor’s Challenge Michelle explained the priority focus areas: Identify individuals for suicide risk, promote connectedness, and increase lethal mean safety planning. SAMHSA/VA agreed to assist us with workforce development, i.e. recruiting more TRICARE providers, as a fourth priority. The next step is to compose the core state team. She shared a list of the SAMHSA required members and the North Dakota Governor’s Challenge website created as a repository of documents and resources.
* Michelle reported that there were two suicides of young airmen at Grand Forks AFB. The base has limited capacity to handle the mental health needs of service members and their regular TRICARE provider had not openings. She briefed the base on the activity of the TRICARE working group. The working group is still waiting for TRICARE to provide answers on the mental health provider credentialing issue. Michelle will consult with Rosalie Etherington, Administrator of the Human Service Centers, about offering the AFBs the same arrangement for services they have with the National Guard. Michelle also reported on her conversation with Alison Trainor of the ND Social Workers Association about recruiting more providers. Lonnie recommend that we encourage more veterans and caregivers to try telehealth and that we need a better understanding of high speed connectivity needs in the state. Joyal stated that she is part of a working group to determine which local public health offices, clinics and hospitals throughout North Dakota can receive telehealth calls. She would be happy to share the results of an upcoming survey. Dr. Weintraub said that some providers are hesitant about telehealth technology too, but when actually tried, some like it. Lastly Michelle reported that she gave Christy Clifton, psychological health director for the National Guard Wing in Fargo the list of VA Community Care providers (who are likely culturally competent) to use if no TRICARE providers are available.
* **Executive Committee Updates**
  + **Co-Chair:** Cindy recently attended the Williston Military Affairs Committee (MAC) and reported that although they are a small organization they are impressive. Once part of the Chamber of Commerce the MAC is working toward becoming a 501 C 3. They plan to build their membership and work the Minot MAC in future.
  + **ND Dept. of Veterans Affairs:** Lonnie Wangen reported that while in DC he spoke with VSUSA, an organization conducts projects for veterans such as buying property and turning it into homeless veterans’ shelters or offering mental health services. Lonnie will keep in contact with them as well as the Elizabeth Dole Foundation, in case a need arises in North Dakota. He also talked about the desire to have a Community Veterans Experience Officer for the state. For legislation Lonnie suggests we support dependent tuition waiver, updating that veterans’ preference for those that are still in the service, property tax and using ARPA funds for county VSOs to scan documents such as DD214s. North Dakota has six empty Vet Center positions so he will reach out to the Guard to see if any counselor would like to help the Vet Centers.
  + **ND Dept. of Health:** Joyal Meyer reported that the North Dakota Suicide Prevention Coalition Conference, which was held in February where 288 virtual and 90 in-person attended. The feedback was very good. She will send links to the recording when available. Lastly Joyal stated that she followed-up on the request for suicide data to match against DD214s and was told data couldn’t be shared. Michelle suggested that we try again through Dr. Wehbi who said he was open to having the discussion for a possible rule change when we talked to him about our data needs for the Governor’s Challenge. Lonnie recommend we continue to work on this.
  + **NDNG:** BG HuberReported that the NDNG lifted the mask mandate. Covid support to the state will end in March concluding over 130,000 personnel days. Deployments continue. They also just completed a flood exercise to prepare what spring may bring. She also stated that soon the Guard will have access to telehealth for regular medical and mental health services. They are also working on the Guards Legislative priorities and meeting with the governor shortly. Finally, BG Humber stated the Guard will provide staff for the Governor’s Challenge.
  + **Fargo VA:** *(The following report was added via email after the official meeting)* Dr. Weintraub reported the VA is back to normal travel status (vs critical-only), meaning they may participate in more outreach activities than previously. The Central Office Mental Health has initiatives to increase staffing for suicide prevention-related programs. There is additional funding for a couple mental health positions as a result, and could possibly obtain more, although recruitment is an issue. The market is tight, so the VA is trying to use what incentives to improve recruitment – but as a federal entity, they do not have nearly the same flexibility as the private sector.

**5. Upcoming Events** Michelle discusses some of the following:

1. **TAPS Peer Mentor Virtual Training:** Mar 28 and Apr 25
2. **First Link Adult Mental Health Fist Aid: Devils Lake/ Bottineau:** March 16/17
3. **First Link Suicide Risk Assessment Webinar:** April 21
4. **First Link Suicide Prevention Awareness Film Festival:** April 28, Fargo Theater
5. **Minot Military Affairs Committee:** April 3
6. **Brain Injury Network, Traumatic Brain Injury Online Trainings (5), Cost 25$**
7. **ACOVA Meeting:** May 19, 20, Veterans Club, Steele
8. **Grand Forks Military Affairs Committee:** March 16
9. **Fargo/Moorhead Military Affairs Committee:** March 17
10. **Devils Lake Military Affairs Committee:** March 24
11. **Williston Military Affairs Committee:** April 1
12. **National Disabled Veterans Summer Sports Clinic: Registration opens** April 1
13. **VA Powerful Tools for Caregivers online series:** April 7 – May 12.
14. **NEXT MEETING DATES**

* The next Executive Committee meeting date is April 7 or 10,10:30 - Noon and the next Coalition meeting date is May 5, 2021, 1:00 p.m.- 4:00 p.m.