 **ND Cares Executive Committee Meeting Minutes  
 January 2, 2025, 10:30 AM  
  
 Attendees: Shelly Sizer, Cindy Whitesell, Kodi Pinks,  
 Rodney Gellner, Lonnie Wangen, Bryan Watters,   
 Pam Sagness, BG Huber, LTC Willoughby, Michelle Panos  
 (All virtual)  
   
 Absent:** David Becker

**1. Opening.** Chairman Shelly Sizer briefly opened the meeting. The minutes from 7 November were approved.

**2. New Business**

* **Executive Committee Updates**
  + **NDDVA:** Lonnie reported on legislation concerning expanded apprenticeships, hyperbaric oxygen treatment for traumatic brain injury and PTSD, including flat fee, definition of a veteran, protecting veterans from companies taking a percentage of claims benefits, veterans aid loan increase from $5000 to $8000, individual unemployability language cleanup, property tax credit cap increase, expanding education for dependents benefits adding a veteran, burial medallions for Guard Members, USS Frankie Evans KIAs addition to the memorial wall, new names from Bridges of the Fallen, and some housekeeping bills.

He is still looking for bill to increase the Post War Trust fund to be able to give more grants up to $5,000 grants for things like dental, hearing aids, glasses and dentures including for spouses.

* + **Regional VA, Fargo:** Rodney Gellner reported that the construction on the new outpatient mental health building is paused until existing underground wiring can be addressed. The VA is trying to enroll more veterans and will embark on a marketing campaign. The Veteran's Advisory Council is meeting again, and they discussed how to reach younger veterans. The VA is just completed another site visit for the Fisher House and is in the preliminary state of land acquisition. Michelle asked if someone could present on the newly passed Elizabeth Dole act, at a later committee meeting. Shelly complimented the VA on the care her father was receiving.
  + **NDNG:** BG Huber reported that on January 12th, there will be a welcome home event for 817th Engineer Company out of Jamestown that has been serving on the southwest border in San Diego. The 142nd Engineer Battalion that deployed in October to the southwest border are in the Texas area providing headquarter support to the units that are assisting Border Patrol. For the Air Guard there will be individual deployments from three to nine months beginning in the spring. Legislatively, they are focused on budget, on increasing the death gratuity to $100,000, and keeping an eye on a bill called Defend the Guard which would require an act of war for National Guard to be activated, but could jeopardize force structure, resource allocation, and the ability to keep federal mission sets. Lastly, she reported on the Military Museum project.
  + **NDHHS**-**Health:** Kodi Pinks stated that as of December 10 there are 20 suicides of current or former military. We're still pending quite a few cases yet, but that's 15.5% of total suicides
  + **NDHHS-Behavioral Health:** Pam Sagness talked about continuing to the implementation of the CCBHC process, the new state hospital, establishing a clear minimum expectation for behavioral health services in every region such as partial hospitalization programs, geriatric psychiatry or community-based forensic mental health instead of sending all to the state hospital. There is also a bill to streamline the contracting process for those associated with the Mental Health Bordering States Compact Act.
  + **NDNG:** LTC Willoughby also talked about the return of the 817th and how some who have never before deployed are now eligible to register with the VA. The annual chili cookoff is Feb 13th. The 142nd Engineer Battalion will have a mid-deployment Yellow Ribbon event, and they anticipate questions about the change in Tricare. Lastly, she mentioned April is the Month of the Military Child and highlighted efforts to raise awareness.

**4. Old Business**Michelle reported on the ND Cares Community Partner presentation to the City of Horace and Legal Services of North Dakota (LSND) in December. She is still working on North Star Credit Union. The radio spot for LSND will run for another three months and working on editing the TRICARE video to 30 seconds for a TV spot. ND Cares has created an X (formerly twitter) account so please follow it at @NDCares15. The 2025 ND Military Data Book is still a work in progress and is waiting on information from Defense Manpower, the VA and state suicide data to complete it. For Governors Challenge Update, Michelle reported on the state’s 988 Service Member and Veteran campaign and how it differs from the media campaign project of ND Hopes Veterans Working Group, talks with Stark County about Crisis Intercept Mapping, upcoming 988 FirstLink training, CALM/Safety Planning training, and the Understanding Veterans and the Military provider training at the RJB Armory on April 23rd. Michelle also talked about meeting with Lori Highberger, the Chief Medical Officer for Behavioral Health of TriWest, the new TRICARE contractor for the western half of the US. We explained our provider issues and she committed to being an advocate or us. She also pointed out that the VA is potentially changing some caregiver support service and a link to provide public comment is posted on the ND Cares Facebook page. Lastly, she mentioned she sent everyone a link to a Rand study on perceptions in military about seeking menta health services and recommendations on cutting through barriers to getting help.

**5. Upcoming Events**

Michelle highlighted some of the events listed below:

1. [**2025 Legislative Session Deadlines**](https://ndlegis.gov/sites/default/files/resource/69-2025/legislative-deadlines/2025-legislative-deadlines.pdf)
2. First day of Legislative Session: Jan 7
3. [**FirstLink Trainings**](https://myfirstlink.org/trainings/): **What Happens When You Call 988**, Jan 15, Virtual
4. [**Star Behavioral Health Providers Training**](https://starproviders.org/providers-tier-training/)
5. [**ND Brain Injury Network Events**](https://www.ndbin.org/events/upcoming)
6. **NDSPC** [**Quarterly**](https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/QA7elUdHSve6NDwjWtGfGw#/registration) **Meeting:** Jan 8, Virtual
7. [**ACOVA Meeting**](https://www.calendarwiz.com/calendars/popup.php?op=view&id=178828055&crd=nddva): Feb 13-14 Comfort Inn, Bismarck
8. ND Cares/VA Provider Mental Health Summit: April 23, RJB Armory, Bismarck
9. [**American Red Cross Military & Veteran Caregiver Network Jan Events**](https://www.redcross.org/get-help/military-families/services-for-veterans/military-veteran-caregiver-network/mvcn-calendar.html)
10. [**NDSPC Hope Cafe**](https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZwkfu2qrD0jEtAsAT_ex1_Y385tqqxpUlMg#/registration): **Safety Planning Resources, Feb. 11, Virtual**
11. Governors Challenge Innovations Conference: May 20-22, Austin TX
12. Suicide Mortality Review Conference: Washington DC, Summer 2025.

1. **NEXT MEETING DATES**

The next Coalition meeting date is February 6,2025, and the next Executive Committee meeting date is March 6, 2025.

The meeting ended at 11:36 AM.