

Washington Legislative Conference Report
February 26, 2024
Veterans Benefits Committee

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Morning Session:

- Lisa Williamson - president. Of the American legion auxiliary - be the one - So prevention and training for the Legion family
- Donald, JR Hall, national commander sons of the American Legion - American legion is stronger as a family with all components working together.
- Matthew Rowley - VHA, innovations ecosystem, office of health and innovation and learning department of veteran's affairs. He discussed what is being done to push healthcare forward within the VA. He discusses 3-D print Imaging for human bone jaw reconstruction surgery. Priority is suicide prevention mission, VA has a federal grant challenge for 20k, to help solve veteran's suicide.
 - Compassionate, contact core (CCC) - The band veterans' access to CCC and social contact resources
 - Veterans' socials (vS) - Understanding program, participation rule veterans that says does program participation increase VA, healthcare, utilization, and enrollment improve access to rule areas.
 - Pharmacogenomic (PGx) - this program Studies how genetic variance affects individual responses to medication. Allowing providers to tailor healthcare intervention to the individual. This project aims to nationally integrate PGX into veterans' healthcare, with a focus on Percutaneous coronary intervention. Veterans have to opt in to this program. Available in all VA facilities. Trail test period only 200K slots left.

Afternoon Session:

During the afternoon session, we had a VA leadership panel discussion. The following people were on the VA leadership panel: This panel fielded questions from multiple state veterans and departments.

- Jamie Areizago Soto - Chairman board of veteran appeals, Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Matthew T. Quinn, Major General, USA, Retired
- Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, National Cemetery Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Dr. Steve Lieberman Deputy Under Secretary for Health, Veterans Health Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs
- Michael Freud Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits, Veterans Benefits, Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs

Below is a recap of a few of the questions and replies:

What is the training frequency for VLJ's? 50 new Veteran law Judges has been added in the last 2 years. Currently there are 133 VLaj on the books. Training occurs when they are in-boarded and 1 week a year, normally early April timeframe. 57% are female board members and 24% are female VLJ.

Is VA providing healthcare to illegal immigrants? VA is not providing health care to illegal immigrant, nor do they pay for their care. However, there are 10 VA staff members that is funded by ICE and they have dual roles and responsibilities.

VA Burial Benefits: If a veteran receives a plaque or urn from the VA they are not eligible to be in-turned in a VA state or national cemetery. This is a federal law which is being addressed.

What is the VA doing about on accredited claim agents and to help Safe Guarding Veterans benefits? - 3.5 billion a week is paid out in veteran's benefits. 7.5 % is fraud, waste, and Abuse. Non accredited claim consults received 3.2 billion last years. The VA is starting a campaign that focuses on using Accredited Veterans Service Officers and accredited claim agents.

Update on appeals: Currently there are around 1100 legacy appeals still pending. They are now looking to address the issues with one judge may hear a veteran's appeal and another judge makes the ruling over a year later. Goal same judge that hears the hearing makes the ruling and reduces the appeals time line to months.

Suicide prevention is the VA number one priority: They are taking the following 2.0 approach: ~~it's~~ it's preventable and should be addressed as a public health priority. They have established call clinics with resources and utilize tele-health. Last year they received 16k referrals. They pay for 30 days of inpatient care and 90 days of outpatient care. They will also cover transportation for the veteran. 81% of the veterans has continued treatment. This program was implemented in January 23 and 15k vets had used the program.

Artificial intelligence - AI is being used to help scan veterans' treatment records. The AI has an 95% accuracy rating on scanning hand written medical records and 100 % for typed medical records. The VBA last year was making around 9k decisions today but they are on track to do 11k decisions per day. In Aug. 2023, they received 220k Pact Act claims. Last year the VA received 2.6 million claims.

VA Cemeteries: VA Cemetery is encouraging Veterans and their family members to Pre-Registration for burial. The VA goal is to have a cemetery within 75 miles of a veteran's residence. Currently funding is limited and they prioritize locations based on the number of veterans in the state.

Legislative Day

On Tuesday, Feb 28th, went with the Tennessee Team to meet with Senator and Blackburn and Hagerty. They held an event called Tennessee Tuesday. Or they came and addressed concerns about issues and our government. Spoke with representative / staffers and promoted the American legion agenda.