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Network Director's Update

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National News: *(Click on titles to read full press release)*

[VA Observes Recovery Act Anniversary With More Progress Nationwide](#) - On the second anniversary of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that Recovery Act funds are playing a

major role this year in advancing much-needed infrastructure and other construction nationwide to benefit our Nation's Veterans. (2/18/11)

[VA Completes Initial Evaluations of Technology Proposals](#) - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has completed the initial evaluation of proposals for its Transformation Twenty-One Total Technology (T4) solicitation to transform its information technology programs, which will result in improved quality of health care and benefits services to Veterans, their families and survivors. (2/17/11)

[VA Announces 2011 Industry Innovation Competition](#) - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced the opening of the 2011 Industry Innovation Competition to identify, fund and evaluate promising innovative technology proposals to improve the quality of health care for Veterans. (2/15/11)

[VA Announces Budget Request for 2012](#) - In announcing the proposed budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) during the next fiscal year, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki emphasized "making every dollar" count in the \$132 billion budget proposal for VA. (2/14/11)

[Sports Programs for Disabled Veterans Expanding](#) - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is awarding two grants totaling \$7.5 million to the U.S. Olympic Committee to enhance recreation and sporting activities for disabled Veterans and disabled members of the Armed Forces. (2/11/11)

[VA & HUD Issue First-Ever Report on Homeless Veterans](#) - For the first time, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development today published the most authoritative analysis of the extent and nature of homelessness among Veterans. According to HUD and VA's assessment, nearly 76,000 Veterans were h

homeless on a given night in 2009 while roughly 136,000 Veterans spent at least one night in a shelter during that year. (2/10/11)

[New and Enhanced VA Benefits Provided to Caregivers of Veterans](#) - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is launching the first of a series of new and enhanced services supporting family caregivers of seriously ill and injured Veterans. In May 2010, President Obama signed the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 legislation authorizing VA to establish a wide range of new services to support certain caregivers of eligible Post 9/11 Veterans. (2/9/11)

[New VA Support Line Provides Important Assistance to Caregivers](#) - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is increasing its support to caregivers with a new, toll-free telephone line for the caregivers of Veterans of all eras. (2/8/11)

[VA Announces Award of First Industry Innovation Competition Projects](#) - Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki officially announced today the first VA Innovation Initiative (VAi2) awards under the agency's Industry Innovation Competition, its third competition since it began in early 2010. These four projects will use innovative new technologies in VA facilities to improve the quality of patient care for Veterans. They represent the first of nearly two-dozen more awards to be made in the coming months. (2/4/11)

[VA Automating Educational Benefits under Post-9/11 GI Bill](#) - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has successfully deployed a new automated system that is delivering faster, more accurate payments to Veterans attending school under the Post-9/11 GI Bill. (1/31/11)

[VA Hosts Public Forum to Improve Disability Compensation Criteria](#) - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is hosting a public forum in Scottsdale, Ariz., aimed at improving the fairness of payments for Veterans who are service-connected for genitourinary, digestive, dental, infectious, immune disorder and nutritional deficiency diseases and injuries. (1/31/11)

[VA Expands Outreach to American Indians, Hawaiians, Alaska Natives](#) - The Department of Veterans Affairs has announced the creation of a new Office of Tribal Government Relations to ensure the more than 200,000 Veterans who are American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians receive the VA benefits they have earned. (1/31/11)

VISN 19:

Joint Efforts to End Veteran Homelessness



Secretary Shinseki has set an aggressive course for the Department of Veterans Affairs in working to end Veteran Homelessness in five years.

All our medical centers in VISN 19 are hosting Veteran Homeless Summits with our community partners to coalesce our efforts in

creating synchronized support to end homelessness amongst Veterans.

We are working to develop a coordinated plan that focuses each of us on our piece of that plan. Toward that end, I am pleased to share news from the Regional Administrator of HUD with you in this issue.



HUD AND VA ISSUE FIRST-EVER REPORT ON VETERAN HOMELESSNESS IN AMERICA *Assessment part of Obama Administration plan to prevent and end homelessness*

WASHINGTON – For the first time ever, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) published the most authoritative analysis of the extent and nature of homelessness among American veterans. According to HUD and VA's assessment, nearly 76,000 veterans were homeless on a given night in 2009 while roughly 136,000 veterans spent at least one night in a shelter during that year.

This unprecedented assessment is based on an annual report HUD provides to Congress and explores in greater depth the demographics of veterans who are homeless, how veterans compare to others who are homeless, and how veterans access and use the nation's homeless response system. Read [*Veteran Homelessness: A Supplement to the 2009 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*](#).

"This report offers a much clearer picture about what it means to be a veteran living on our streets or in our shelters," said HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan. "Understanding the nature and scope of veteran

homelessness is critical to meeting President Obama's goal of ending veterans' homelessness within five years."

"With our federal, state and community partners working together, more Veterans are moving into safe housing," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "But we're not done yet. Providing assistance in mental health, substance abuse treatment, education and employment goes hand-in-hand with preventive steps and permanent supportive housing. We continue to work towards our goal of finding every Veteran safe housing and access to needed services."

Last June, President Obama announced the nation's first comprehensive strategy to prevent and end homelessness, including a focus on homeless veterans. The report, *Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*, puts the country on a path to end veterans and chronic homelessness by 2015; and to ending homelessness among children, family, and youth by 2020. [Read more about the Administration's strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness in America.](#)

Key findings of the report released today include:

- More than 3,000 cities and counties reported 75,609 homeless veterans on a single night in January of 2009; 57 percent were staying in an emergency shelter or transitional housing program while the remaining 43 percent were unsheltered. Veterans represent approximately 12 percent of all homeless persons counted nationwide during the 2009 'point-in-time snapshot.'
- During a 12-month period in 2009, an estimated 136,000 veterans—or about 1 in every 168 veterans—spent at least one night in an emergency shelter or transitional housing program. The vast majority of sheltered homeless veterans (96 percent) experienced homelessness alone while a much smaller share (four percent) was part of a family. Sheltered homeless veterans are most often individual white men between the ages of 31 and 50 and living with a disability.
- Veterans are fifty percent more likely to become homeless compared to all Americans and the risk is even greater among veterans living in poverty and poor minority veterans. HUD and VA examined the likelihood of becoming homeless among American veterans with particular demographic characteristics and found that during 2009, twice as many poor Hispanic veterans used a shelter compared with poor non-Hispanic veterans. African American veterans in poverty had similar rates of homelessness.

- Most veterans who used emergency shelter stayed for only brief periods. One-third stayed in shelter for less than one week; 61 percent used a shelter for less than one month; and 84percent stayed for less than three months. The report also concluded that veterans remained in shelters longer than did non-veterans. In 2009, the median length of stay for veterans who were alone was 21 days in an emergency shelter and 117 days in transitional housing. By contrast, non-veteran individuals stayed in an emergency shelter for 17 days and 106 days in transitional housing.
- Nearly half of homeless veterans were located in California, Texas, New York and Florida while only 28 percent of all veterans were located in those same four States.
- Sheltered homeless veterans are far more likely to be alone rather than part of a family household; 96 percent of veterans are individuals compared to 66 percent in the overall homeless population.

HUD and VA are currently working together to administer a joint program specifically targeted to homeless veterans. Through the *HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Program*, HUD provides rental assistance for homeless veterans while VA offers case management and clinical services. Since 2008, a total investment of \$225 million is working to provide housing and supportive service for approximately 30,000 veterans who would otherwise be homeless.

In addition, last month HUD awarded \$1.4 billion to keep nearly 7,000 local homeless assistance programs operating in the coming year. The Department also allocated \$1.5 billion through its new *Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-housing (HPRP) Program*. Made possible through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, HPRP is intended to prevent persons from falling into homelessness or to rapidly re-house them if they do. To date, more than 750,000 persons, including more than 15,000 veterans, have been assisted through HPRP.

Stakeholder Tip...

One of our very active Veteran advocates, Mr. Joe Potter wanted to ensure that all Homeless Veterans program staffs and VSOs were aware that he has confirmed with the Denver Police Department that the larger police departments **DO** have **free** emergency cell phones that are able to dial "911" for 'homeless people'.

The smaller cities' police departments have the capability to also obtain them as well as very 'low cost' cell phones for those people (veterans included) who have low-incomes.

The following is an advisory sent out by the National Guard Bureau (NGB) in reference to a group called "**Veterans Affairs Services**"

An organization called Veterans Affairs Services (VAS) is providing benefit and general information on VA and gathering personal information on veterans. This organization is not affiliated with VA in any way. Websites with the name "VA services" immediately after the "www" ARE NOT part of the Department of Veterans Affairs; the real VA website ends in.gov.

If approached or called, do not offer them any information concerning yourself or data on other veterans. The Department of Veterans Affairs does not randomly call veterans, nor does it ask veterans for information which it does not already have. If you have not dealt with the VA previously and in person, then you receive a call from someone saying they are with the VA or something similar sounding, hang up the phone. Do not respond to emails which suggest that they are from the VA. The VA never conducts official business nor asks for personal information by email.

VAS may be gaining access to military personnel through their close resemblance to the VA name and seal. NGB Legal Counsel has requested that the NGB Provost Marshal Office coordinate with DoD to inform military installations, particularly mobilization sites, of this group and their lack of affiliation or endorsement by VA to provide any services.

Sample of group's header



VA Police Services are urged to disseminate this information to in case of inquiries from veterans and to prevent their unwittingly release of Personally Identifiable Information (PII).

February is American Heart Month

Heart disease kills an estimated 630,000 Americans each year. It's the leading cause of death for both men and women. To prevent heart disease and increase awareness of its affects, the VA is proudly participating in [American Heart Month](#). You can make healthy changes to lower your risk of developing heart disease. Controlling and preventing risk factors is also important for people who already have heart disease.



- Watch your weight.
- Quit smoking and avoid secondhand smoke.
- Control your cholesterol and blood pressure.
- Drink alcohol only in moderation.
- Get active and eat healthy.
- Talk to your doctor about taking aspirin every day if you are a man over the age of 45, or a woman past menopause.
- Manage your stress.

Eastern Colorado Health Care System



Denver, CO – Replacement Medical Center Facility

The Denver VAMC (parent Eastern Colorado Health Care System) is providing monthly updates on the status of the Denver Replacement Hospital. Updates are distributed via e-mail monthly and can be found on <http://www.denver.va.gov/projecteagle/index.asp>.

Forum attempts to better combat homelessness among veterans Article reprint: SARA CASTEL-LANOS, The Aurora Sentinel

AURORA | Five years ago, Nora Johns was kicked out of her daughter's house with only the clothes on her back. The U.S. Army veteran was diagnosed in 1979 with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and bipolar disorder. Her family was tired of tending to her needs, so she was forced to wander the streets alone.

"I didn't know anything about being homeless," said Denver resident Johns, 62. "I always had a job and income and a home to live in, so this was new to me."

Johns was a guest speaker at the Veterans Affairs Homeless Forum on Feb. 7 — the first of its kind in Colorado. The event was sponsored by the Denver VA hospital and garnered about 90 people including VA staff, representatives from several Colorado homeless and health care providers, officials from the Aurora Mental Health Center and Colorado First Lady Helen Thorpe.

The goal of the forum was to bring awareness to the issue of homelessness among veterans and come up with ways to help people like Johns get off the streets and into stable housing.

With the help of the Denver VA facility, Johns received a federal homelessness voucher and now lives in an apartment. Johns said she didn't know how easy it was to become homeless until she was on the streets herself because of a series of unfortunate circumstances.

"I realized this could happen to anyone, especially the way the economy is," she said. The VA was able to help Johns and now she says she feels the need to give back.

She currently spends hundreds of hours volunteering for various charities. But Johns' struggle is not uncommon among people who have come back from wars and tried to reintegrate into society. An estimated 1,650 homeless veterans were living in predominantly urban areas around eastern and southern Colorado in 2009, according to Denver VA data.

More than half of the people who attended the homelessness forum divided up into groups to discuss the issue further and propose possible solutions. Mike Kucera, deputy director of adult services at the Aurora Mental Health Center, said the break-out session was an opportunity to make sure everybody was on the same page.

For example, his group talked about how veterans are in need of more than just housing when they're on the streets. "When they come back with PTSD or issues around domestic violence, when they come back with broken families, I think you've got to look at trauma-based treatment models," he said.

It's also important to make sure they have appropriate case managers and that they get back on their feet by obtaining any necessary work training or retraining, he said. "All vets don't have the same needs," he said. "Just to provide housing alone isn't going to do it." Kucera also learned that combating homelessness among veterans is not just a task for one single entity — it has to involve the entire community. "It cannot be an isolated effort," he said. His only qualm with the meeting was that he wished more Aurora officials were there. Several Aurora organizations were invited but very few Aurora officials attended.



Robb Robichaud, administration officer, holds up a program during a veterans homelessness forum Feb. 7 at the Denver-based Eastern Colorado Health Care System. (Heather L. Smith/The Aurora Sentinel)

"I would have loved to see some more people from the city," he said. Because Aurora has a large military presence with Buckley Air Force Base, the issue of ending homelessness among veterans is a critical undertaking for the city, Kucera said. "I think this is really important for the community of Aurora," he said. "This is a large part of who we are."

Ending veteran homelessness is also being discussed at the federal level, said Richard Garcia, the regional administrator for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. "The issue of ending chronic homelessness among veterans is an important part of the Obama administration ... this is the kind of local commitment that's necessary in order to get a conversation started," said Garcia at the forum.

Bringing people together and streamlining services is of utmost importance when it comes to helping veterans, said Gary Sanford, the director of the Colorado Community and Interagency Council on Homelessness for Gov. John Hickenlooper. "Preventing homelessness really does save us money as opposed to waiting until somebody falls into homelessness," he said.

Denver VA staff members at the forum also launched their five-year plan to end veteran homelessness. The goals are to find the chronically homeless and mentally ill veterans scattered across the metro area, then offer them services, house them, help them in identifying plans for recovery, help them overcome barriers to maintaining housing such as treatment, benefits and employment, and finally, prevent further homelessness by providing assistance during crises.

Denver VA Medical Center to Host Veteran Art Show

Artwork by Veterans will be on display to the public at the Denver Veterans Affairs Medical Center, 1055 Clermont Street, Denver, CO 80122 on February 28 from 9:00am to 3:00pm. It is estimated that over 100 pieces of art from among 50 different categories will be exhibited.

Categories consist of fine art such as painting, drawing, sculpture and photography; applied art that includes ceramics, woodcarving, needlework and leatherwork; and craft kits such as string art, poster art and fabric art. Local artists will judge the artwork earlier in the day to determine first and second place for each category, as well as one Best in Show prize. Prizes will be awarded at a 2pm award ceremony. The first place winning pieces will advance on to the national level where they will compete with entries submitted by Veterans from other VA facilities around the country.

The competition is an annual event that provides Veterans receiving treatment at VA facilities the opportunity to participate in creative self-expression in art, creative writing, dance, drama and music as part of their therapy, and to gain recognition for these artistic accomplishments.

First place winners from the national competition will be invited to attend the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, hosted this year by the Veterans Health Care System of the Ozarks in Fayetteville, Arkansas the week of October 17-24 with the art exhibit and stage show performance on Sunday, October 23.

Grand Junction VAMC



TeleBenefits Will Connect More Veterans with Services They Have Earned

Colorado U.S. Senator Michael Bennet applauded the launch of a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) pilot program that will help give Colorado veterans better access to the services they have earned.

TeleBenefits will link veterans who reside in rural communities in the Western Slope, and are served by TeleHealth Clinics in Craig, Glenwood Springs, Montrose and Grand Junction, to speak face-to-face with a veterans benefits counselor via secure video conferencing system.

The program, run by the VA's Denver Regional Office in cooperation with the Grand Junction VA Medical Center, will allow veterans dealing with complex cases to avoid the expense of traveling to Denver for services.

"Our veterans have served our country honorably, and they have our endless gratitude for their dedication and sacrifices," Bennet said. "We, in turn, have an obligation to ensure that they have access to the benefits they have earned. This program will ensure that veterans in rural communities can have direct contact with benefits counselors without the expense and difficulty of travel."

Veterans interested in participating in the TeleBenefits program can call the clinic or medical center to make an appointment.

Currently, there are 42,000 veterans living on the Western Slope, and around 12,500 of them are registered for care with the Grand Junction VA Medical Center. Up to 8,000 of the remaining veterans are eligible for health care and other benefits but have not accessed them.

Location and contact information for TeleBenefits appointments are below:

Craig Telehealth Clinic

785 Russell St Suite 400
Craig, CO 81625
970-824-6721 April Branstetter
april.branstetter@va.gov

Glenwood Springs Telehealth Clinic

2425 S Grand Ave
Glenwood Springs, CO 81601
970-945-1007 Mollie Deines molli.deines@va.gov

Montrose Community Based Outpatient Clinic

4 Hillcrest Plaza Way
Montrose, CO 81401
970-249-7791 Krista Thompson
krista.thompson@va.gov

Grand Junction VA Medical Center

2121 North Avenue

Grand Junction CO 81507
970-242-0731 Elaine Taylor x 2555
mary.taylor5@va.gov

VA Montana Health Care System:



VA Montana hosts forum to address Veterans homelessness

By Mike Molina

HELENA, Mont. – Officials from the Department of Veterans Affairs Montana Health Care System joined more than 100 people from across the state at the Regional Forum 5-Year Plan to End Homelessness Among Veterans at the Helena Civic Center on Feb. 16.

The forum was hosted by VA Montana Health Care System and brought together professionals from the community and other agencies to collaborate on solutions to help Montana's homeless or near homeless Veterans.

"As a village, we are going to end Veterans homelessness in our community," said Robin Korogi, director of VA Montana Health Care System.

The event was part of Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki's top priorities to end Veterans homelessness. In November 2009, Shinseki announced the department's five-year comprehensive plan to end homelessness among Veterans.

The plan includes preventive measures like discharge planning for incarcerated Veterans re-entering society, supportive services for low-income Veterans and their families and a national referral center to link Veterans to local service providers. Additionally, the plan calls for expanded efforts for education, jobs, health care and housing.

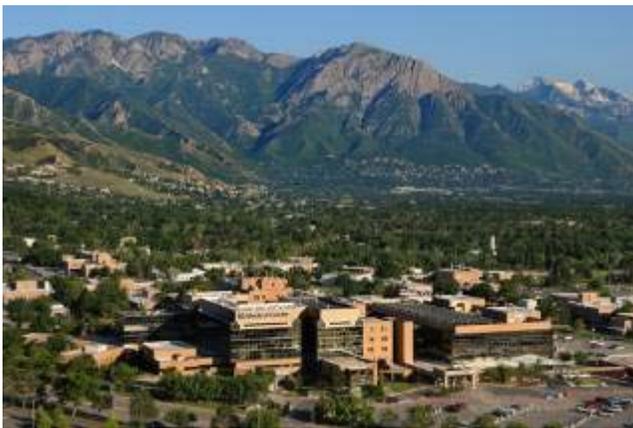
"This forum is one of our first attempts at touching other agencies and putting together a lot of resources,"

said Rich DeBlasio, homeless coordinator for Veterans Integrated Service Network 19, which includes VA facilities throughout Montana, Wyoming, Utah and Colorado. "I am extremely impressed with your efforts here in Montana. We've got a lot ahead of us, but today you took an important step."



PHOTO CAPTION: Officials from VA Montana Health Care System hosted more than 100 people at the Regional Forum to End Homelessness Among Veterans at the Helena Civic Center on Feb. 16. Some 45 VA Montana program offices, community organizations and other government agencies were represented at the event. (Photo by Mike Molina)

VASLCHCS



Agencies help homeless veterans

Article reprint: Tiffany De Masters

ST. GEORGE - Pat Richter, U.S. Navy veteran, has been homeless for two-years.

"The lack of work caused me to be homeless," he said. "You can only live off your family and friends for so long before you have to stand on your own two feet."

Richter is one of many veterans who are homeless in the state of Utah. The Department of Veterans Affairs has worked to identify these veterans and reach out to them - educate them on the assistance that's available to them.

At Dixie Care and Share on Friday, the VA, along with other agencies, conducted an outreach effort, "Homeless Veterans Stand Down 2011," to see how many homeless veterans are in the St. George area.

"There's a directive in the VA to end homelessness for veterans," said Al Hernandez, homeless program supervisor for the VA. "Anyone who serves this country shouldn't be homeless." Hernandez said the goal is to connect the veterans with the VA and the community.

"It isn't just the VA, but it's a community obligation as well to help these veterans," he said.

Veterans end up on the street, Hernandez said, for numerous reasons - there are mental health issues, depression and drug and alcohol abuse. "That (issues) leads to straining relationships with family and friends to where they (veterans) end up on the street," he said.

Along with the VA, other programs represented at the event were: St. George Soup Kitchen; Red Rock Center for Independence; Dixie State College dental hygiene program; VA suicide prevention program; Job Corps; Department of Workforce Services; Veterans Center, and The Ark of Little Cottonwood.

Everyone who participated in the event volunteered their time. Hernandez said if veterans weren't interested in services they were giving out winter gear.

"The biggest hope (from this event) is to raise awareness and encourage veterans to access resources through the VA - at the very least we have winter gear," Hernandez said.

Gloria Boberg, executive director and CEO of The Ark, said the facility is a residential or outpatient clinic that treats veterans and adults who suffer addiction or mental health issues.

Boberg is passionate about helping veterans.

"I have a long history of family active in the military and I have a great respect for them," Boberg said.

As the years have passed, Boberg said, she's glad to see programs that are paying attention to veterans. When veterans are out in the field, she added, they're not typically seen for mental health issues and end up falling through the cracks.

"We just haven't seen systems in place to help," Boberg said. "Veterans don't know what's out there and

available - veterans come home they want get their lives back but don't know how."

Ruben Garcia, executive director of the Care and share, said he hopes the "Stand Down" becomes an annual event. "The men and women who make the sacrifices should be recognized and they should be treated special," he said.

Terry Dunne, commander of Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States in St. George, came to the event to support his fellow veterans.

"I try to let them know about their benefits so they can get the benefits they're entitled to," he said.

It can be hard at times to reach out to the homeless veterans.

"The veterans are kind of shy," Dunne said. "They don't have access to a computer, they don't have a way to know what help is available to them - it takes an event such as this to get them to come out to see if there is something they qualify for."

Dunne said if they're able to help one homeless veteran, they'll be successful.

"It's an ongoing job to seek out our brother and sisters in arms and see if we can help them," he said.

Richter said he didn't know what services were available to him through the VA until several months ago.

"(Veterans don't know) because one, we're stubborn - and since we've discharged ourselves from the military we think they no longer have an obligation to us," he said. "Or we're stuck on self-pity, like I was."

Richter was one of the homeless veterans the VA was able to successfully assist Friday. The VA hired him on the spot to be a driver for those veterans who are in need of transportation to get up to the VA hospital in Salt Lake City.

Sheridan VAMC:



Over 40 community program staff and volunteers attended the Sheridan VAMC's first annual Homeless Veteran Forum.

The theme of the forum, "After serving in the military, Homeless should not be the next tour of duty" facilitated the lively discussion of what the state of Wyoming could do by partnering with the VA to end Homelessness in 5 years.

Debra Hirschman, Director of the Sheridan VA pointed out, "this is a daunting task, but a challenge we at the Sheridan VAMC and all our clinics across the state are passionate about taking on."



Attendees included clergy, staff from Volunteers of America, staff from Senator Enzi, Barrasso and Congressman Lummis office and countless other private and public organizations that want to help VA make an impact for VA.

The forum kicked off with a welcome from Director Hirschman and a "life story" from Veteran Mike Putnam. Mr. Putnam explained that when he retired from the military he "had a few challenges and found myself in the Sheridan VAMC." Putnam explained to the forum participants that without the support and then transition support of not just the VA but programs in the community he has now moved into his own home and has a great job.

The facility is planning to make the forum a regular and active group. For more information or if you want to participate in the next forum, contact Will Banks at 307-675-3823.

Cheyenne VAMC:



Earlier this month, Cheyenne VAMC Homeless Veteran Program Manager Vanessa Stapert called to order a meeting of the 1st Homeless Veterans Forum in Cheyenne.

This meeting was attended by nearly 30 members of various agencies and organizations throughout our patient service area. Attendees included VA Homeless Veterans Program staff and VISN 19 Homeless Coordinator as well as staff from the State of Wyoming Workforce Services, State of Colorado Department of Labor, Larimer County Workforce Services. A District Representative from Sen. Barrasso's (WY) office as well as case managers from PEAK Wellness, Northern Catholic Charities, and other agencies also attended the forum.

One of the main goals of this forum was to enhance our formal community partnerships where each organization can contribute ideas and resources which support the community as well as the VA Secretary's goal to eliminate Veteran homelessness.

Stapert says, "The goal to eliminate Veteran Homeless will be achieved through six pillars VA has identified as critical to meet this challenge. An important pillar is the partnerships within each community." Stapert says that while the VA has many programs and resources dedicated to this challenge, functionally, getting Veterans into homes and healthcare is a result of many groups working towards the same mission.

The six pillars VA has identified as critical to end Veterans Homelessness are:

- 1) Outreach & Education (examples include Stand-Down events, linkage with shelters and drop in sites)
- 2) Treatment (examples include medical care and mental health counseling as well as case management services)

- 3) Prevention (this includes local intervention by VA staff and the VA's National Call Center for Homeless Vets 877-424-3838)
- 4) Housing / Support Services (examples would be emergency housing, Grant & Per Diem transitional programs and HUD/VASH permanent housing)
- 5) Income & Employment Benefits (Compensated Work Therapy, community partners like Skills'Kin, Wyoming Workforce Services and Veteran Service Organizations are successful programs in the area served by Cheyenne VAMC)
- 6) Community Partnerships (shelters & drop in sites, community treatment agencies, government agencies with Veterans Justice Outreach)

Each of these pillars represents an important piece to the approach used by VA to eliminate homelessness among Veterans. And it's working. The latest numbers show that in 2008, there were about 131,000 homeless Vets across the entire nation. In 2009 there were about 106,000 in the nation, nearly a 20% reduction in the numbers of Homeless Veterans.

In the tri-state area served by Cheyenne VA, VA staff actively case manage about 140 Homeless Veterans and have distributed nearly 100% of the HUD/VASH vouchers allocated for our area.

23 percent of Wyoming homeless are veterans *Article reprint By Josh Rhoten – WyomingNews.com*

CHEYENNE -- About 23 percent of the homeless population in Wyoming is made up of military veterans, according to a study conducted in 2009. The same study showed that, nationally, about 16 percent of the homeless population were veterans. The study also showed 11,300 younger veterans, ages 18 to 30, were in shelters at some point during 2009. Those statistics come from a point-in-time survey completed by various agencies working together to get information about the homeless population in America. The study also said that veterans make up about 10 percent of the adult population.

"We do point-in-time studies to show us where the homeless population is and sort of get a head count," said Vanessa Stapert with the Cheyenne Veterans Affairs Medical Center. Stapert works as a health-care coordinator with homeless veterans.

According to the study, about 75,000 veterans were living on the streets or in temporary shelters during one night in January 2009. Wyoming accounted for just 0.2 percent of that total, with 117 homeless veterans counted across the state.

Stapert also works with veterans from Northern Colorado. According to her data, about 1,471 veterans

in the entire state of Colorado were homeless during the survey, accounting for about 2 percent of the national total. One study, completed in 2010, identified 45 veterans as homeless in Fort Collins, Colo. alone.

"Most of the homeless veterans in Colorado are in the Denver and the Colorado Springs area. Traditionally, the vets gravitate to places with a little more temperate climates and larger populations," she said. "Actually we (in Cheyenne) are one of the smallest facilities in the region and in the U.S."

The data collected from the 2009 survey is not broken into separate categories, such as date of service. But Stapert said those seeking help in Northern Colorado seemed to be on the younger side, serving in the Gulf War era, while those in the Cheyenne group tend to consist of Vietnam-era soldiers.

President Barack Obama has tasked various departments with a joint effort to eliminate veteran homelessness by 2015. The VA is one of the major groups working toward that goal.

"Starting from the top, we have tried to expand and increase our services to veterans," Stapert said. "That includes working with local community partners like the Peak Wellness Center and Community Action of Laramie County to make sure veterans know about our services and can access them."

COMEA House is another local partner with the VA. Homeless shelter Director Robin Zimmer said this January, 15 percent of the residents at the shelter were veterans.

"When people first come to us, one of the things we ask is if they are veterans, and recently we have seen a rise in people saying 'yes.' Part of that may be because there are more, but I think it also comes from people knowing there are more options and help available to veterans now," Zimmer said. "The VA is doing a good job of developing services. Their challenge now is to get the word out, which is something they are working on constantly."

Much of the in-house help Stapert and the VA give is preventative, meaning they work to make sure veterans have the help they need should they find themselves in a tough spot.

"We get a lot of calls from people who say, 'I just lost my job,' or 'I may not be able to pay my rent this week.' So we help them with the various agencies in the area, as well as provide technical assistance where we can," she said.

Andrew Ruben, public affairs officer with the Cheyenne VA, said the department does its best to create a "net with many tightly woven threads."

"There is no way for us to have a bucket to catch every single person, but we are constantly working on making threads of our assistance net -- like technical training and support for those who recently lost their jobs - tighter," Ruben said.

The VA homeless programs served about 92,000 veterans in 2009, according to their website.

Ruben also cited programs like the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans, a toll-free information hotline, and the Veterans Justice Outreach program, which gives legal aid to veterans, as part of the ongoing effort to get aid to veterans.

"Even one homeless veteran is too many," Ruben said.



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