

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE
OREGON DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS (ODVA)**

Quarterly Meeting

Wednesday, June 3, 2015

9:30 AM – 12:00 PM

Department of Public Safety Standards and Training
4190 Aumsville Hwy SE, Salem

MINUTES

Al Herrera, Advisory Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:30 AM.

Chair Herrera asked Jerry Lorang to lead the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chair Herrera asked Dennis Guthrie to give an invocation.

Chair Herrera introduced himself and asked the Committee to make introductions:

Jerry Lorang - Portland

Dennis Guthrie – Redmond

Cameron Smith – Director, ODVA

Mike Jones – Ontario

Tony Garcia – Portland

Ryan Howell – Albany

Kevin Owens – North Bend

Trisa Kelly - Portland

Chair Herrera asked the guests to introduce themselves:

Robert Haltiner, MOPH, Dept Adjutant

Charles Upton, MOPH, Dept Commander

Charles Richards, Governors Commission on Seniors, NW Senior Services Board Member

Kevin Kalama, USDVA, Benefits Administration

Eric Belt, ODVA

Jay Lloyd, 1st Marine Division Association

Steven Price, Marine Corps League

Lois Price, Marine Corps League

John Stensland, MOAA

Ed Van Dyke, ODVA

Julie Owens, ODVA

Laurie Skillman, ODVA

Mary Jaeger, ODVA

Peter Trnavskis, ODVA

Cody Cox, ODVA

John Osborn, ODVA

Dan Herrigstad, VA Portland Health Care System, Public and Congressional Affairs

Van Moore, Westcare Management

Betty Herrera, Ladies Auxiliary, MOPH
Ron Morgan, President, VVA Oregon State Council
Dwight Holton, CEO, Lines for Life
Aimee Johnson, Suicide Prevention Coordinator, Portland VA Medical Center
Tracy Ann Gill, ODVA

Chair Herrera asked for a motion to approve the meeting minutes from the March 4, 2015 Committee meeting.

Dennis Guthrie motioned to approve the minutes.

Jerry Lorang seconded.

The motion was unanimously approved.

ODVA Director's Report

Director Smith thanked guests for coming and DPSST for hosting this event. He also thanked the Advisory Committee for traveling from as far as Ontario and North Bend to make the meeting and for their service on the Advisory Committee throughout the year.

ODVA is celebrating its 70th Anniversary as a department of the State of Oregon. The department was first stood up in the final year of WWII. The department serves veterans over 4 generations and 5 major wars, from WWII to today. Oregon has over 320,000 veterans with challenges and opportunities across policy issues for their health, wellness, education, economic opportunity, and housing.

In honor of the 70th anniversary ODVA has been featuring stories of across all generations on our social media sites, blog, website and with the state legislature. Seventy stories leading up to the actual anniversary date of June 16, 2015.

On June 16th ODVA will celebrate with staff and former ODVA employees at a BBQ luncheon and on June 24th the Veteran Benefit Expo will be held at the Salem Conference Center where we will celebrate with veterans and service providers and partners from around the state.

The legislature is in its final month and today we will hear from committee members with updates on legislation; policy bills, honor and recognition bills, as well as our budget bill.

Cameron applauded this committees' work over the past year and our work with the veterans' community; but there is still work to be done to raise our voice and deepen legislative relationships. Veterans issues have the best policy area and great concepts, but efforts need to continue to raise issues with the legislature.

Director Smith reported on the updated 2014 VA Statistics which reports \$2.5 billion dollars flowing back into Oregon, up \$300 million from 2013. Of that, an additional \$182 million is direct cash benefits to veterans and families for disability and compensation and low income pension. That speaks to both our state and county veteran service officers and national service organizations who advocate for Oregon veterans.

Subcommittee Updates:

Included with the briefing packet handed out to committee members and available on the website are updates from the ODVA staff on Financial Services; Veterans Home Loan Program; Legislative Affairs; Statewide Veteran Services; Communications, Facilities and Construction; Edward C. Allworth Veterans' Home; and the Oregon Veterans' Home in The Dalles.

Jerry Lorang shared information about the Veterans' Benefit Expo and encouraged everyone to attend and share information about the Expo with their respective organizations. State and county veteran service officers will be on-site and available to talk with veterans and provide services. There will be representatives from state, federal, and community benefits and resource programs. The Expo will be held on 24 June at the Salem Conference Center.

Kevin Owens thanked Cody Cox for his service and management of the Home Loan Program. Dennis Guthrie also thanked ODVA staff for preparing the reports.

Laurie Skillman reviewed the ODVA Bills Activity Report with the committee. Tony García talked to the audience about Veterans Preference and encouraged everyone read the legislation and talk with their respective legislators if they have any comments. A hard copy of the Bills Activity Report was given to Committee members and was available for guests.

Suicide Prevention Presentation

Director Smith stated one out of every ten Oregonians is a veteran, but veterans makeup 25% of suicides in the state; about 150 a year. Suicide affects younger and older veterans alike. Complex factors such as unemployment, family relationships, housing, access to mental health, health care and financial stress are all stressors. Our veteran service officers need to be the best trained and have access and information to organizations to help veterans.

Director Smith introduced Aimee Johnson, Suicide Prevention Lead Coordinator from the Portland VA Health Care System and Dwight Holton, CEO, Lines for Life.

Aimee Johnson works out of the Portland VA Health Care Center. Part of her job is outreach to educate the community, health care providers and veteran service officers. Another key roles is to respond to calls from the Veterans Crisis Line; a 24-hour hotline where people can call, text or chat online.

The call line was created in 2007 and has received over a million, close to two million calls. Another key role is to reach out to people and families and follow up after a crisis. They help veterans not feel so isolated during times of stress and encourage them to get continued help, whether at the VA or somewhere else. Call takers are knowledgeable about the services available so we can provide resources to veterans in need.

Dwight Holton is the CEO of Lines for Life. Lines for Life is a non-profit dedicated to preventing substance abuse and suicide. They work closely with the VA and suicide prevention for veterans is their core mission. Lines for Life grew out of a substance abuse and crisis service and added a military help line. They also partner with law enforcement who deal with mental

health disorders. Lines for Life gets calls daily where someone is in serious distress and asking for help. Sometimes these people are afflicted with mental health issues or just daily challenges or substance abuse.

About 35,000 calls were received last year and close to 14,000 of those calls were veterans and family members. They estimate this year that number is going to increase to 25,000. Lines for Life has over 125 volunteers who have gone through 60 hours of training and commit themselves to 200 hours on the lines. Lines for Life is available to callers 24 hours a day/ 7 days per week / 365 days a week ready to connect callers with help.

Veteran Suicide Challenge

Every 65 minutes a veteran takes his own life. In Oregon, veterans are more than twice as likely as non-veterans to die by suicide. Veterans are about 8 percent of the population, yet make up about 25 percent of the suicides in Oregon. For veterans under the age of 45, suicide is the leading cause of death. We have a unique challenge.

Mr. Holton handed out a packet for committee members and walked them through the presentation.

Lines for Life is one of four centers nationwide and takes crisis calls from the federal VA number. Callers are usually men; issues include substance abuse, financial stresses, relationship issues, and post-traumatic stress related challenges.

Lines for Life runs two help lines; they answer federal VA crisis line calls and in 2010 established the Military Help Line. Lines for Life and Director Smith hosted a Lines for Life telethon with the help of KPTV.

Another program they run is called Home Base. Home Base is a federal VA funded grant to help reach rural vets. Mr. Holton stated 30 percent of Oregon vets live in rural areas. This program will help connect veterans with services and crisis intervention information to veterans in rural areas. They are currently working with Tillamook and Umatilla counties in Oregon and three counties in Washington.

Lines for Life also has a partnership with law enforcement. Law enforcement encounters with mental health related issues has increased and encountering folks with PTSD and mental health incidents can be challenging. A partnership started 6-7 years ago where law enforcement gets hands on experience by working at the crisis line. They work with several agencies around the state to include the Portland Police Department and Marion County Sheriff's.

Mr. Holton said community partners need to get better identifying at risk veterans earlier. Lines for Life wants to have contact with emergency rooms - most suicide victims were in the emergency room within a year of committing the act. If you follow up with people who are in emergency rooms with suicide idealization, follow up calls at 10, 20, 30 days after should take place.

Mr. Holton said Lines for Life will continue to work with ODVA and is pleased to announce the State appropriation for a crisis line was up for consideration and confirmed with the legislation yesterday.

Jerry Lorang thanked Dwight and Aimee for their presentation and said the Advisory Committee shares their passion for resolving this crisis.

Mr. Lorang asked how often does it occur that there was no prior indication that a suicide may possibly happen? What are other key indicators?

Aimee Johnson stated most people, veterans and non-veterans, who die by suicide have been in the hospital or visited a primary care doctor within 45-90 days. Often there are not warning signs in a health care setting. There is not one theory, but many complicated factors when it comes to suicide.

The Federal VA prevention efforts include placing posters in VA primary care offices on firearm safety. The VA has mental health and behavioral care available at all clinics.

The Federal VA is working together with the Department of Defense to gather more formal statistics on veteran suicides. One statistic is that of the 22 veterans a day who are dying by suicide, 17 are not getting any VA health care services.

Mr. Guthrie commented that if you ask a veteran if he is going to commit suicide they are trained to mask pains and insecurities. It is just as important to train family members to detect indicators.

Mr. Lorang asked if there a concern about deaths that are not identified as suicides? Ms. Johnson commented that a suicide is usually determined by a local county medical examiner or coroner. Federal VA knows death by suicide is underreported given other possible events like single car auto accidents or substance abuse. Most people who commit suicide don't want to die, they just want the pain to end.

Ms. Johnson showed a firearm safety video and shared with the group there are firearm safety locks available today.

Video:

<http://www.veteranscrisisline.net/Resources/Videos.aspx?v=-fGHTvTsApg>

Tony García thanked Aimee and Dwight for their presentations and asked they please pass on the Advisory Committee's gratitude for all their work and the work of the front line staff, especially those who answer the phones.

Director Smith and the Advisory Committee requested a tour of Lines for Life. Mr. Holton will work with Mrs. Gill to set up a meeting and tour. Director Smith also made the recommendation that suicide prevention training be embedded in CVSO/VSO annual training.

Chair Herrera thanked Ms. Johnson and Mr. Holton for their presentations.

Officer Elections:

The nominating committee met and makes the following recommendations for executive committee positions:

Chair: Dennis Guthrie
Vice Chair: Trisa Kelly
Secretary: Tony García

Chair Herrera asked the committee if there were any other nominations; there were none.

Per the Committee bylaws, elections can be made by voice vote if there is only one candidate for a position.

Jerry Lorang made a motion to approve the executive committee nominations.
Kevin Owens seconded.
The motion was unanimously approved.

Cameron Smith thanked Chair Herrera for his service as Chair over the past year. He stated effective July 1st incoming executive committee members begin their term at which time Chair Guthrie will review and recommend changes if needed. It is still the role the former Chair to submit the Advisory Committee annual report to the Governor in September 2015.

Old Business:

Annual Report and Timeframe:

Included in the Committee packet is a draft outline and structure for the annual report for review and consideration. A draft report will be ready in August. The report will be submitted to the Governor in early September.

New Business:

Veteran Benefit Expo:

The Veteran Benefit Expo is scheduled for June 24, 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM at the Salem Convention Center and is free for veterans and their family. The event will provide a “one stop shop” experience and bring together state and federal benefits and programs as well as valuable community resources. There will be more than 50 different state and federal benefits representatives and more than 30 community resource organizations.

Next Advisory Committee Meeting:

The next Advisory Committee will be held at the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce, 415 S. HWY 395, Hermiston, on Wednesday, September 2, 2015.

Public Comment:

Charles Upton, MOPH, Dept Commander stated HR 2036 passed and signed by the governor. HR 2036 is related to the Purple Heart Trail. The Purple Heart Trail an interstate that now stretches from Mexico to Canada and makes Oregon a Purple Heart State, one of 14.

John Stensland, MOAA commented he had the privilege on 15 April of going to Washington DC and represent MOAA in front of our congressional delegation. MOAAs main concern was to address the Presidents 2016 budget and military benefits. MOAA want the advisory committee to be aware and stand up and partner with MOAA to present concerns to elected officials.

Mr. Stensland also noted Representative Julie Parrish is proposing a constitutional amendment to allocate for 5% of lottery dollar to veterans programs and veterans support.

The United Veterans Group of Oregon which represents all 11 service organizations has stood behind this bill by gathering signatures and is anticipating getting the amendment on the 2016 ballot.

The Advisory Committee Business Meeting was adjourned at 11:25 AM.