



**THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
BOROUGH OF THE BRONX  
COMMUNITY BOARD 7**



RUBEN DIAZ, JR., BOROUGH PRESIDENT    EMMANUEL MARTINEZ, CHAIRPERSON    ISCHIA BRAVO, DISTRICT MANAGER

## VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

<b>Chair:</b>	<b>Chad Royer</b>
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>Wednesday, May 26, 2021</b>
<b>Meeting Time:</b>	<b>6:30 PM</b>
<b>Members: (Check Those In Attendance)</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chad Royer <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Emmanuel Asamoah <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hugo Gonzalez <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Jean Hill <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Jeffery Hunter <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Helene Redd <input type="checkbox"/> Adaline Walker Santiago
<b>Minutes done by:</b>	<b>Chad Royer</b>

**Minutes:**

- I) Introductions**
- II) Review of previous minutes (If applicable)**
- III) Follow-up from previous month (If applicable)**
- VI) New Business**
  - a) Invited Panelists For The Veterans Roundtable On Health and Mental Health Challenges That Veterans Are Facing: Joseph Bello, member of the Bronx Borough President's Veterans Advisory Council; Amjad Mujaahid, Bronx Neighborhood Health Promoter and former US Marine Veteran; Allison T Baker LCSW, Suicide Prevention Coordinator at the VA; Tashany Myers, Nurse Case Manager in Transition Care Management; Melissa Walters MSW, Director of Prevention and Aftercare Services with Department of Veteran Services (DVS); and Raul Gonzalez, Veterans Affairs Liaison of Union Community Health Center.**
  - b) Veterans Roundtable Discussion**
    - 1) Department of Veterans Services has begun addressing mental health assessments through intakes. Social isolation from the pandemic, stigma around mental health, and statistics of 20 to 23**



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suicides per day are some points that make it very important for clinicians to ask the question even when it is uncomfortable to ask the question. A GAD-7 (General Anxiety Disorder-7) and PHQ 9 (Patient Health Questionnaire 9) assessment is used to assess anxiety and depression. Asking the question concerning mental health is an important task for clinicians, trainers and professionals to do so that we assess symptoms and minimize instances where a veteran considers suicidal thoughts

- 2) A strategy being used is identifying health and mental health service partners that veterans can be referred to for veterans who may not have VA benefits that can be used in the Bronx VA hospital. Some of the services may accept Medicare or Medicaid, while others may be free. There is a referral specialist at the Bronx Bureau Access Center at 1826 Arthur Avenue and one of the initiatives called veteran support service network is designed to connect veterans and families with partners who can do the work. The customer service piece is key because it is important to identify the issues and work on the healing so that people can move on and focus on their health and wellness. The Bronx Vet Center is another organization who provides many services to veterans, and we all should start promoting even more so that veterans know that they are not alone. A challenge that veterans face is if they had an experience where people would deny their feelings, yet no one really knows what individual veterans may have gone through. It is important to be sensitive and to become active listeners so that we can be more supportive and help navigate veterans to the needed resources.



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- 3) **The VA has a team that provides education crisis intervention training, consultation and case management to veterans, staff and community providers and the goal is to assist veterans who are identified as high risk for suicide and have not been able to access care at the VA. The VA also has a rapid access clinic where a veteran who comes in can see a psychiatrist or a therapist on site. There are grants that organizations can apply for so that the community can also provide services to veterans where there is a gap in coverage not handled by the VA. The Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019 was signed into law on October 17, 2020 and the VA hopes this will help provide education on suicide risk for families, provide clinical services and emergency treatment, case management, and peer support services.**
- 4) **In New York City, about 70% of all veterans are 55 years and over. The city council is looking to see where funding can come from since more funding is needed for DVS to provide mental health services. Many veterans and staff members unfortunately passed away due to COVID and there will be a major need for mental health services for veterans, compensation, and vet-to-vet programs just to see how they are doing.**
- 5) **Union Community Health Center is a medical and dental provider in the Bronx. One of the biggest issues is finding individuals who have gaps in their coverage, especially when many of the older veterans may not be technologically savvy or able to take part in telemedicine appointments. Everyone in the center from doctors to receptionists took part in a cultural**



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competency course so that once veterans were identified, they can feel welcomed when they come to the center.

## c) Questions

- 1) Many veterans suffer from mental issues. What are some of the services available to them and how can we reach out to those who are homeless so that they can be in a position to help? The VA has a rapid access clinic that is available to veterans who want to get an immediate assessment, access to a therapist, or medication management. There is a veteran's crisis line that veterans are encouraged to use. Some veterans were given iPads so they could have virtual appointments and some who were homeless were able to get phones. Community Support Services Manager and Acting Chief of Social Work Latonya Hayward ([Latonya.heyward@va.gov](mailto:Latonya.heyward@va.gov)) and Health Care For Homeless Veterans Coordinator Dr. Toshi Francis ([toshi.francis@va.gov](mailto:toshi.francis@va.gov)) can provide some information on address the homeless veteran population. DVS has a Unitas Platform, an online referral platform that handles intake for mental health assessments and DVS has Vet Check, an outreach line where over 16,000 veterans have been called and provided health referrals. As the city starts to open, communities need to have better inner city collaborations with the homeless and the Department of Homeless Services, as they have street teams that do counts and provide food and services to the homeless population. Having a better liaison to accompany the street teams while targeting areas of major gatherings are some creative examples of identifying homeless veterans in order to provide help.



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- 2) **What are some accommodations and benefits to be expected by a family when a veteran passes away? DVS can help veterans and family members dealing with the medical examiner and help with the referral to the VA to help identify veterans eligible for benefits and help with burial at the National Cemetery. Decedent Affairs Officer Tannisha Richardson (tannisha.richardson2@va.gov) is one of the coordinators who can assist with questions and paperwork. That office can be reached at 718 584 9000 ext 4686. One suggestion that was mentioned was to continue having resource fairs that educate family members on estate planning and final arrangements so that families are prepared and not taken by surprise when something does not go right. Another suggestion was make a connection with the local funeral homes in the neighborhood so that they can submit documents to the VA on behalf of the family and be more of a resource in finalizing a location for burial of a veteran.**
- 3) **How can veterans approaching retirement age retain good quality dental care regardless of their discharge status? At the Department of Health and Mental hygiene, there is a certified health insurance specialist who can identify health and dental services and health insurances at a low cost based on eligibility on a sliding scale, and this can be provided in multiple languages. The Union Community Health Center has 3 clinics that provide services on a sliding scale for anyone, including veterans. There will be a mobile dental van that will be going out in the community starting next month so that services can be provided in multiple areas. More than half of veterans in the**





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**Bronx do not use the VA for dental services, so having additional providers open the door for more people in need of dental service. The challenge is that only veterans who served a minimum 6 months, are 100% disabled or whose disability is based on their teeth or jaw get some sort of dental coverage from the VA,**

- 4) Veterans whose disability rating is under 100% are not eligible for dental services. How does this affect a veteran's experience when they seek medical care and are there plans to address this with a solution? Homeless veterans and veterans receiving vocational rehab services can receive dental services. Everyone is eligible for mental health services and they are encouraged to file the claim for service connection so it bridges the gap in getting coverage, even if the VA does not pay for the services. The real issue comes down to why people are getting dishonorably discharged and once they are separated, the veteran has to go through the VA to address an upgrade to discharge.**
- 5) What type of resources are needed in mental health counseling and will this be an expense that the Department of Veterans Affairs would need funding to accommodate? There is a need to target policy funding initiatives into the federal, city and state budgets to address these issues. Bronximpact.org is a free website full of various referrals and it can provide information based on zip codes. NowPow is another resource where organizations pay a fee to become a member. During the fiscal year 2021, Congress authorized \$174 million to fund the Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Prevention Grant program. This**



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is a three year community-based grant program that would provide resources to community organizations serving veterans and families nationwide. Organizations can apply for grants up to \$750,000 and may apply to renew from year to year. The program wants to provide education on suicide risk prevention, provision of clinical services for emergency treatment, case management services, peer support services and VA benefits for eligible individuals and families. Individuals can also call 1-888-NYC WELL to speak to someone and get referrals based on the location and the need.

6) What are the plans if any to dedicate community centers for veterans and their families where they can gather safely during the COVID period? Many of the community centers are not open yet and they have to do clean downs and put in the necessary protocols to be safe. There will have to be a limited number of people in the beginning until more people become vaccinated. A suggestion was made to utilize our city parks since they are free to use and it allows us to socially distance while addressing the isolation issue.

VII) Next meeting date: TBD, June 2021 – Veterans Committee Roundtable

VIII) Discussion on next month's agenda

IX) Adjournment