



## VETERANS RURAL HEALTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE

April 21-23, 2021  
Zoom virtual meeting  
11 AM – 2:30 PM (EST), each day

### NOTES

#### Attendees:

##### **Committee Members Present:**

Deanna Lamb  
Lonnie Wangen  
Joe Parsetich  
Andrew Behrman  
Graham Adams  
Angeline Bushy  
Stephanie Birdwell  
Keith Mueller  
Brenda Moore  
Francisco Ivarra  
Michael Mclaughlin  
Katherine Miller

##### **Ex-Officio Members Present:**

Ben Smith  
Tom Morris

##### **Department of Veterans Affairs Staff Present:**

T. F. Klobucar (Designated Federal Officer)  
Judy Bowie (Committee Manager)  
Sheila Robinson  
Travis Lovejoy  
Janice Garland  
Karyn Johnstone  
Anthony Achampong  
Carolyn Turvey  
Derek Chatham  
Dan Palmeri  
Vince Watts  
Rich Huang  
Thomas Garloch

Byron Bair  
Keith Myers  
Matt Vincenti  
Sarah Ono  
LaTonya L. Small  
Samantha Solimeo  
Kelly Lora Lewis  
Ernest Moy  
Dennis May  
Larry Mole  
Nancy Dailey  
Ryan Sharpe  
Terry Bentley  
Phillip Welch  
Charlene Pope  
Susan Roberts  
Jeremiah Jackson  
LaTrouna Tobias  
Kristan Murray  
Sergio Romero  
Jennifer Eckerson  
Jeff Moragne  
Betty Moseley Brown  
Chi Szeto  
Peter Vicaire

##### **Consultants Present:**

Stephen Miles  
Robert Derby  
Beth Schwartz  
Jasmine Williams  
Scott Bledsoe



**Public Attendees:**

Tammy Bartlet, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)  
Kristina Keenan, VFW  
Roy Delarosa, Native American Veterans Association  
Andy Blevins, Minority Veterans of America  
Patricia Jackson-Kelley, National Association of Black Military Women  
R. Demichelis II

Rene Campos, Military Officers Association of America  
Kenneth Harman  
Kelly Hunt  
Brian Neelon  
Melanie Davis  
Shauna Rust, United States Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
Cassandra Evans-Brown  
Jack Stephens  
Alana Harrigill

**Meeting Objectives**

1. VRHAC will gain increased understanding of VA's health care programs supporting minority rural Veterans.
2. VRHAC will gain insight into minority rural Veterans' perceptions and behaviors regarding access and quality of care.
3. VRHAC will gain increased understanding of the Office of Rural Health's current programs and research initiatives to support minority rural Veterans.
4. VRHAC will identify topics of focus for fall 2021 meeting.



## **Wednesday, April 21 2021**

### **Welcome, Introductions and Meeting Overview**

*Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee*

- Chair convened meeting, conducted introductions and reviewed agenda.

### **Webinar Tools & Instructions**

*Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications*

- Reviewed Zoom functions, meeting and facilitation protocols.

### **2021 Spring Meeting Focus: Minority Rural Veterans Overview**

*Thomas Klobucar, Executive Director, Office of Rural Health, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*

- Reviewed rural health care access challenges and rural Veteran demographics.
- Discussed VA COVID-19 response and vaccination efforts
- Highlighted formation of new VA Federal Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs.
- Answered questions about rural broadband expansion.

### **Presentation: Office of Health Equity Observations of Underserved Populations**

*Dr. Ernest Moy, Executive Director, Office of Health Equity, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*

- Provided overview of health equity issues and Office of Health Equity (OHE) functions
- Highlighted OHE key partners and strategies to improve health outcomes
- Explained recent laws and executive orders related to equity work within federal agencies
- Discussed OHE work to ensure equitable VA COVID-19 response
- Answered questions on race/ethnicity VA data collection and methods and effectiveness of COVID-19 outreach efforts

### **Presentation: VA's COVID-19 Response and Minority Rural Veterans**

*Dr. Larry Mole, Chief Officer, Population Health Services, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*

- Discussed COVID-19 case numbers within VA's patient population, timeline of VA's COVID-19 response, and key milestones
- Highlighted rural challenges in COVID-19 response, emphasizing that resource access was an obstacle.
- Discussed the "Save Lives Act" which expands populations VA can vaccinate
- Answered questions about plans for future booster shot distribution and outreach to Hispanic Veteran community



## **Presentation: Center for Minority Veterans Efforts Regarding Minority Rural Veterans**

*Dennis O. May, Acting Executive Director, Center for Minority Veterans, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*

- Provided background and history on the Center for Minority Veterans (CMV)
- Discussed CMV outreach efforts to minority Veterans, including use of Minority Veterans Program Coordinators (MVPC) and the work of the Secretary's Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans (ACMV)
- Highlighted FY 2020 CMV outreach statistics
- Answered questions about current challenges and outreach efforts to rural minority Veteran populations.

## **Wrap Up & Close**

*Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee*  
*Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications*

- Committee reviewed highlights, concerns and outstanding questions regarding the day's presentations.

## **Thursday, April 22, 2021**

### **Welcome, Introductions and Meeting Overview**

*Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee*

- Chair reconvened meeting and reviewed agenda.

### **Webinar Tools & Instructions**

*Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications*

- Reviewed Zoom functions, meeting and facilitation protocols.

### **Research Perspective: Identifying racial disparities in diabetes and other chronic diseases using geospatial analysis**

*Dr. Kelly Hunt, Professor, Department of Public Health Sciences, Medical University of South Carolina*

- Discussed project design and research outcomes regarding geography and race's effect on diabetes outcomes; highlighted recommended solutions
- Answered questions about data collection methodology, community care network diabetes data, and dissemination efforts for findings

**Research Perspective: Physician communication with minority Veterans**

*Dr. Charlene Pope, Chief Nurse for Research, Health Equity & Rural Outreach Innovation Center (HEROIC), Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center*

- Discussed research project to examine provider communication to white and black patients during diabetes care visits.
- Highlighted recommended solutions to improve physician communication o minority patients, such as unconscious bias training
- Answered questions about size and scope of study sample.

**G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VAMC Leadership Panel (Clinical Perspective: Outreach and Treatment)**

*Dr. Susan Roberts, Chief of Staff*

- Provided overview of VAMC service area, services provided and patient populations
- Discussed demographic breakdown of COVID-19 vaccination statistics
- Highlighted outreach and treatment efforts for minority and rural Veterans during COVID-19
- Answered questions about mobile unit use, tele-sleep program, COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy, and rural health care COVID-19 challenges

**Veterans Service Organization (VSO) Leadership Panel (Service Perspective: Treating the Whole Veteran)**

*Patricia Jackson-Kelley, President, National Association of Black Military Women*

*Roy Delarosa, Spiritual Advisor, Board Member, Native American Veterans Association*

*Andy Blevins, Operations and Policy Director, Minority Veterans of America*

- Panelists provided background information on their organizations and discussed current challenges faced by various minority Veteran populations
- Discussed the need to incorporate cultural competency into care for minority Veteran populations
- Answered questions about COVID-19 outreach, obstacles to care, and VA areas for improvement

**Wrap Up & Close**

*Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee*

*Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications*

- Committee reviewed highlights, concerns and outstanding questions regarding the day's presentations.



**Friday, April 23, 2021**

**Welcome, Introductions and Meeting Overview**

*Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee*

- Chair reconvened meeting and reviewed agenda.

**Webinar Tools & Instructions**

*Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications*

- Reviewed Zoom functions, meeting and facilitation protocols.

**VAMC Veteran Panel (Minority Rural Veterans' Perspectives: What We Need)**

*Cassandra Evans-Brown (United States Army)*

*Jack Stephens (United States Air Force)*

- Panelists discussed experiences navigating VA care in the areas of provider/staff interactions, specialty care referrals and administrative processes.
- Discussed need to improve VA providers' and staff communications with Veterans, ensure better continuity of care, and treat Veterans holistically.
- Answered questions about biggest challenges faced and key areas for change.

**Facilitated Discussion, Part 1**

*Thomas Klobucar, Executive Director, Office of Rural Health, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*

*Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications*

- Committee reviewed previous meeting content, discussed key thematic takeaways from presentations, and began formulating initial list of topics for fall meeting.

**Facilitated Discussion, Part 2**

*Thomas Klobucar, Executive Director, Office of Rural Health, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*

*Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications*

- Committee continued brainstorming list of key themes and developed a final list of topics for consideration for fall meeting. List covered areas of training, patient experience, facility assessment, broadband infrastructure, transportation and mobile units
- Committee agreed on voting process to determine focus areas for fall meeting.

**Wrap Up & Close**

- Chair thanked Committee members for their work and adjourned meeting.

**VA**



**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

Veterans Health Administration  
*Office of Rural Health*

**Public Comment Period**

*Dr. Thomas Klobucar, Executive Director, Office of Rural Health*

*Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee*

- No public comments.