

Minutes from #2 AZ Veterans' Commission Strategic Policy Update Meeting, 7 Sept 2023, by Kathy Gallowitz

First Draft of Overall Priorities:

- Decrease suicide through improved education, collaboration and coordination of services.
- Improve access to healthcare for rural Veterans.
- Increase affordable housing and decrease homelessness.
- Increase the number of Veterans that become teachers and healthcare providers.
- Offer Medicare reciprocity for credentialing TRICARE providers.
- Educate employers on Veteran-hiring best practices, draw Veterans and military spouses to AZ and create the AZ Employer Council.
- Expand Veteran Treatment Courts and other support of justice-involved Veterans.

Add these bullets in support of DVS, Director priorities:

- Understand and potentially streamline eligibility requirements for residents and enable staffing of Arizona's Veterans Nursing homes.
- Monitor and promote the effectiveness (#claims, approval rating) of Veteran Benefit Counselors, in particular those in rural and tribal areas.
- Support the identification of high-risk Veteran populations.

Would like to know the "current state" of Arizona's Veterans to potentially identify needs of Veterans and add this information to the final document. Commissioner information is mostly anecdotal. How/can we obtain info about:

- Economic Status of Veterans: Jobs, Workforce development, Barriers
- Healthcare needs: Prevalence of Physical, Mental health Conditions
- Suicide: Rates, Reasons, Barriers
- Affordable Housing: Status, Homelessness, Barriers
- Financial Well-being of Veterans and their Families
- Education: Postsecondary Graduation Rates, Barriers; Family Challenges

Other questions:

- Are Veterans significantly impacted by immigration, border security or water issues?
- Is deportation of Veterans a concern?

Summary of Commissioner, Governor & ADVS priorities

I. Promote Employment and Talent Development

- Educate employers on Veteran-hiring best practices (P)
- Attract Veterans/Military Spouses to Arizona's workforce (P)
- Draw Native Americans back to Arizona after their military service (P)
- Develop a State Veteran Employment Council (P)
- Create hiring preferences for able/disabled Veterans in state and local government jobs (P)
- Establish 3% state contract set-asides for Veteran Owned Businesses (P)
- Incentivize small business and local governments to hire Veterans (P)
- Expedite military medics into civilian healthcare jobs a (P)
- Add funding to Troops to Teachers so that more Veterans can become teachers (P)
- Elevate property tax and Income threshold of state tax exemption (P)
- Make twenty tribal/rural Verteran Benefit Counselor's (VBC) a budget line item (P)
- Monitor and promote the overall effectiveness (#claims, approval rating) of Veteran Benefit Counselors, in particular those in rural and tribal areas. (A)

- Support Arizona Coalition for Military Family's:
 - *Arizona Veteran Supportive Employers (AVSE)* program
 - DOD Skillbridge
 - "*AZHires Vets,*" to employ more Veterans in state government jobs

II. Improve Access to Mental and Physical Healthcare

- Broadly support suicide prevention strategies, to include:
 - Support funding of Arizona Coalition of Military Family's *Be Connected Support Line, Resources and Navigator Training* (P)
 - Support DVS':
 - Suicide prevention training pilot program to educate VSO leaders and VBC's (A)
 - Stakeholder outreach to facilitate Veterans receiving a warm handoff to civilian life (A)
 - Outreach to Veterans to foster awareness about direct services and benefits (A)
 - Hiring VBCs to specialize in rural areas (A)
 - Identification of high-risk Veteran populations.
- Expand tele-health and tele-medicine into rural communities, including extending broadband and fostering digital literacy (A)

- Fund *Star Behavioral Health* to educate civilian behavior health providers about military culture and learn evidence-based intervention best practices (P)
- Advocate for adding “Ask a Veteran: Have you or family served in Armed Force?” to all state agency forms (A)
- Support the needs of Aging Veterans in these ways:
 - Protect and grow the cemetery trust fund with the intent to build more Veteran cemeteries across the state (P)
 - Provide memorial grants for private and municipal cemeteries (P)
 - Veterans’ widows, by providing better communication and coordination of benefits (A and P)
 - Foster collaboration of Arizona HealthCare Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) and Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) to better support Veterans aging in rural communities (A)
 - Understand and potentially streamline eligibility requirements for residents and enable staffing of Arizona’s Veterans Nursing homes.
- Support development of more Veterans Treatment Courts:
 - Increase funding (P)
 - Share best practices (A)
 - Promote DVS’:
 - Development of a “Justice Involved” Veterans tool kit (A)

- Full utilization of the Housing Coordinator on staff
- Support organizations that provide legal assistance to Veterans (A)
- Keep needs of Veteran subgroups top of mind - Minority, Women, Disabled, Rural: (A)
 - Support DVS' engagement with Native Americans:
 - Create rural and tribal engagement events using satellite internet capabilities
 - Deploy tribal traditional healing program
 - Monitor impact of water crisis
- Advocate for these Federal issues:
 - Provide Veterans paid transportation to healthcare appointments, especially rural Veterans. (A)
 - Offer Medicare reciprocity for TRICARE provider credentialing (P)
 - *Fisher Homes* in Phoenix, Prescott and Tucson (A)

III. Ensure Access to Affordable Housing

- Expand affordable housing options for Veterans (P)
- Ensure Veterans have access to HUD-VASH vouchers (A)
- Monitor and promote financial stability for military families (A)
- Support these plans/programs:
 - Arizona Veteran Homeless Action Plan (A)

- DVS Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program (A)

IV. Improve Educational Outcomes for Veterans and their families

- Monitor Veterans' postsecondary graduation rates and barriers for successful completion (A)
- Fund Purple Star Schools to foster awareness about the needs of and support for military children K-12 (P)