

# **VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION**

## **WEEKLY UPDATE**

Week Ending — 02/09/2024

### ***Division Operations***

#### **Meetings:**

- February 5-9: VA&R Division continues to prepare for Washington Conference
- February 7: VA&R Director attended the Equity in Innovation Working Group focusing on the innovation process and how to best build programs around veterans' needs.
- February 8: VA&R Director attended veteran service organization leadership meeting with the Undersecretary for Veteran Benefits.

## *Health Policy Team Operations*

### **Meetings:**

- February 5: Health Policy Team (HPT) met with Chairman James to brief current issues, legislative asks, and pertinent legislation regarding Underserved Veterans.
- February 5: HPT attended the Toxic Exposures in the American Military (TEAM) Coalition Subcommittee on Veterans and Family meeting to discuss toxic exposure policy.
- February 7: HPT virtually attended the Veteran Service Organization (VSO) Monthly Health Care and Mental Health Suicide Prevention meeting to discuss upcoming legislation.
- February 7: HPT and Benefits Team met with Chairman James to brief current issues, legislative asks, and pertinent legislation regarding toxic exposure and updates on The Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act.
- February 8: HPT attended the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Virtual Minority Veteran Outreach Symposium: Celebrating Black History Month to discuss updates on VA benefits, PACT Act, and Vet Centers.
- February 8: HPT virtually attended the monthly VSO Prosthetic Workgroup where the VA prosthetic and sensory aids service team gave an update on policies, procedures, and process of obtaining vehicle modifications and how veterans are evaluated and trained to use these modifications and aids.
- February 9: Deputy Director for Health Policy (DDHP) and Vice Chairman Alan Cohen met with VA Peer Support Specialist Edwin Hoffmann to discuss their peer support program and potential areas for collaboration.
- February 9: HPT met with Scot Burroughs, Executive Director of the VA Physician Assistant Services (PAS) Office regarding recruitment, retention, and training of physician assistants at the VA.
- February 9: HPT virtually attended a meeting with Amber Capone, Co-Founder, Veterans Exploring Treatment Solutions (VETS), where VETS provided an update to Stanford clinical trial, and current status of Ibogaine treatment and legalization efforts.

### **Legislative Bill Reviews:**

- *In progress, pending approval:* **S.3598 – Scheduling for Community Health and Easy Data to Understand for Legislators to Evaluate Services (SCHEDULES) Act of 2024 - Support**
  - To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a comprehensive standard for timing between referrals and appointments for care from the Department of Veterans Affairs and to submit a report with respect to that standard, and for other purposes.

**Supporting Resolutions:**

- [Resolution No. 14: Access to Care](#)
- [Resolution No. 31: Care in the Community Eligibility for Cancelled Appointments](#)

- *In progress, pending approval:* **S. X – Extension and modification of the transportation grant program - Support**

- To extend and modify the transportation grant program of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

**Supporting Resolutions:**

- [Resolution No. 62: Veterans Transportation System and Benefits Travel](#)
- [Resolution No. 119: Support More Service Programs Benefiting the Rural Veteran](#)

- *In progress:* **H.R.2413 – Dental Care for Veterans Act**

- To amend title 38, United States Code, to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to furnish dental care in the same manner as any other medical service, and for other purposes.

## *Benefits & Claims Team Operations*

### **Meetings**

- January 29-31: Veteran Benefits Policy (VBP) team conducted a Regional Office Action Review (ROAR) site visit to meet with VA administrators and employees of the St. Petersburg, FL office to find best practices and areas for improvement.
- February 3: VBP team participated in bi-monthly VSO partnership meeting concerning VBA claims, appeals, and legislative issues.
- February 6-7: Deputy Director for Benefits & Claims attended a two-day VA summit on the issues of The Veteran Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017 (AMA) hosted by the Board of Veterans Appeals and VA Office of Administrative Review (OAR). The summit discussed issues with the current AMA appeals process and how to reduce the remand rate of the Board.
- February 5: VBP team attended an American Legion's VA&R Commission Chairman in-brief/prep session regarding underserved veteran population with members of the HP team in preparation for The Legion's upcoming annual testimony on Capitol Hill in March.
- February 7: VBP team attended an American Legion's VA&R Commission Chairman in-brief/prep session regarding military toxic exposures with members of the HP team in preparation for The American Legion's upcoming annual testimony on Capitol Hill in March.
- February 8: Benefits & Claims team hosted 2024 Q1 Nationwide American Legion Service Officer meeting featuring guest speaker Mr. Tony De Falco, Vice President of International Operations of the Veterans Evaluation Service, and Mr. Glen Bergmann and Mr. Paul Sullivan from Bergmann & Moore. More than 150 VA-accredited American Legion service officers attended the virtual meeting from all over the world.

## *Claims & Appeals Team Operations*

### **Accreditations**

- Applications received from TAL Departments 12
- Certifications submitted by TAL Washington Office 12
- Certifications approved by VA's Office of General Counsel 7

### **The American Legion Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA) Unit**

- AMA appeals pending (125+ days) 0
- Informal Hearing Presentations (IHPs) prepared 193
- Memos generated 3
- Phone inquiries 265
- Internal quality reviews 3
- Individual training 1 hours
- Team training 6 hour
- Hearings 2
- Board dispositions 205
  - o Appeals granted 58 (28.3%)
  - o Remanded 111 (54.1%)
  - o Denied 24 (11.7%)
  - o Other 12 (5.9%)
- Largest retroactive awards won for veteran \$69,246

### **Senior Veterans Disability Claims Specialist**

- Compensation & Pension Claims 101
- Other Issues 3
- Contacts 104

### **Pension & Debt Management**

- New Claims 11
- Supporting Submissions 18
- Sensitive Claims 0
- Rating Reviews/Audits 63
- Contacts 78
- Debt Notices Received 37
- Insurance Questions 4
- Waivers Granted 1
- Pension Notification Letters Processed 164

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End of VA&R weekly update – 02/09/2024