



## FY20 MDVA Veteran Homes Virtual Site Visit Report



**Date:** June 26, 2020

**Location:** Virtual

**Dept.** Rehab Committee Members: Wilson Spence, Lynn Lyons, Bill Brockberg, Gary Munkholm and Dan Tengwall. Dept. Service Officer, Jeremy Wolfsteller.

**RE:** The American Legion Dept. Rehabilitation Committee is tasked with staying engaged with agencies that aid Minnesota veterans. The committee does this by conducting System Worth Saving Site Visits throughout the year. These locations include Sioux Falls, Fargo, St. Cloud and Minneapolis VA Healthcare Systems, St. Paul and Fargo Regional Offices, Minneapolis, Hastings, Luverne, Fergus Falls and Silver Bay Veterans Homes. Additional Site Visits are conducted at VA CBOC's, Vets Centers, and Minnesota nonprofits that serve veterans when the budget allows.

**Meeting Attendance:** Chairman Wilson Spence, Bill Brockberg, Lynn Lyons, Dan Tengwall, Gary Munkholm and Jeremy Wolfsteller. MDVA's Deputy Commissioner Hughes & Senior Director of Veterans Health Care, Simone Hogan.

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### Meeting Minutes:

- March 13, 2020, Governor's Emergency Executive Order 20-32 Ensuring that Healthcare Providers Can Respond Quickly and Safely During the COVID-19 Peacetime Emergency. In Executive Order 20-01, I directed all state agencies to submit proposed orders and rules to protect and preserve public health and safety.
  - *March 2020, MDVA submitted the agencies Emergency Executive Order 20-03, "Protecting Residents of Minnesota Veterans Homes during the COVID-19 Peacetime Emergency".*
    1. Pursuant to Minnesota Statutes 2019, section 12.21, subdivision 3(1), to protect residents and staff of Minnesota Veterans Homes, the Commissioner of Veterans Affairs is authorized to implement a temporary visitor policy consistent with any of the guidelines contained in CMS's March 13, 2020 "Guidance for Infection Control and Prevention of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Nursing Homes (REVISED)" and any subsequent revisions of that document, up to and including a ban on all visitation. Such a ban will not apply in end-of-life situations and to state and federal nursing home regulatory authorities when requesting access to Minnesota Veterans Homes. The Commissioner is encouraged to support residents during this time and find ways to replace personal visits with phone calls, video conferencing, or other methods of communicating with friends, family, and other would be visitors.
    2. Minnesota Veterans Homes may deny admission or readmission to any person who meets the qualification to become a resident of a Minnesota Veterans Home unless that person has been screened prior to entry for signs or symptoms of COVID-19, including high fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, or contact with a person with a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19 in the past 30 days, or are under investigation for COVID-19. Precautionary measures may be required for persons admitted to a Minnesota Veterans Home. Precautionary measures include, but are not limited to, isolation or quarantine, wearing personal protective equipment, social distancing, or visiting in designated locations.

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### Meeting Minutes Cont.'

3. Minnesota Veterans Homes may prohibit a person to work or volunteer in a Minnesota Veterans Home unless the person has been screened for symptoms at the start of every shift and does not show any symptoms associated with COVID-19, including high fever, cough, or difficulty breathing.
  4. Residents of a Minnesota Veterans Home may be subject to isolation in their rooms away from other people when one or more residents, staff, contractors, volunteers, or visitors of that Minnesota Veterans Home are subject to MDH or local health department recommendations or order of isolation or quarantine for COVID-19. A resident can choose to be discharged from a facility at any time.
  5. Because compliance with Minnesota Statutes 2019, section 144.651, subdivisions 26(a) and 27, and Minnesota Rules 2019, part 9050.1070, subparts 6 and 11, will prevent, hinder, or delay necessary action under this Executive Order, those provisions, and any other provisions in Minnesota Statutes or Rules that are inconsistent with this Executive Order, are waived and suspended during the peacetime emergency declared in Executive Order 20-01.
- The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) is currently updating their State Inspection to include new COVID-19 infection control survey. Nursing Homes are required to report information about how COVID-19 is impacting their residents.
  - The MDVA Homes were mandated to institute "COVID-19 Areas" which are areas of isolation for residents with the virus. Because of these requirements, the Homes have anywhere from 10% to 30% of their beds empty. This means the Homes are losing reimbursement from the Federal VA extremely fast.
  - MDVA implemented "limited new admissions" since March. Admissions teams are working with veterans on the wait list updating them on when they are expecting to open to new admissions. There has been an acceptance of three new admissions during COVID-19 due to the nature of the situation.



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### Meeting Minutes Cont.'

- COVID-19 funding changes include a Federal VA increase of daily per-diem rates. This represent a 2.9% increase for FY21 that goes into effect immediately due to COVID-19. These rates can be found here:
  - [https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/providers/SH\\_Payment\\_Rate.asp](https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/providers/SH_Payment_Rate.asp)
  - MPLS Adult Day Program was suspended early March due to COVID-19. The Adult Day Program Staff created a virtual adult day program consisting of virtual activities and currently have 30-37 active participants. *MDVA has requested to reinstate their Federal VA per-diem based on this virtual program. Currently waiting on MPLS VA Health Care Systems Director to sign off on the request.* If approved, the funding would help offset some of losses due to COVID-19.
  - Health and Human Services has a process in place to allow for grants that are submitted and approved by Minnesota Management & Budget. These grants are to help offset any losses in funding due to COVID-19, i.e. (PPE, Beds empty, overtime, temp staff).
  - The state legislature will resume meetings to approve for the second part the biennium budget. The Governor has requested all state agencies submit a budget that reflects a 5% cut.

*Chairman: Wilson Spence*

*Secretary: Jeremy Wolfsteller*

**The American Legion Dept. of Minnesota  
Dept. Rehabilitation Questionnaire**

**Date:** 6/23/2020

**Agency:** Minnesota Dept. of Veterans Affairs Veterans Homes

**Topic:** COVID-19 Updates

- 1) What policies and practices have been made for the COVID19 pandemic?

Overall – we have put in place approximately 20 different protocols as it relates to COVID-19. Initially those protocols were changing every day based on the changing guidance from CDC and MN Department of Health. Lately the guidance changes have slowed and we are working on updating those interim protocols to healthcare policies moving forward. Most important to us at this time are family in-person visits, that will follow MDH guidelines, but will be operationalized at each facility as the building layout and other ongoing projects allow.

- 2) Has there been additional Federal or State Funding to assist with the pandemic? If so, please explain.

Yes – we have received funding from both – including the VA. However, the funding that was provided to the states relating to COVID has yet to be distributed to agencies. There does not seem to be enough funds to cover revenue losses and additional expenses that have been unique to the pandemic. We have a budget surplus from this fiscal year, but unless more funds are received, the SVH as a whole might be operating in a deficit.

The federal VA increased our per diem this past spring, and also are continuing to fund a portion of the adult day program while it is running a virtual program at this time. Yesterday we heard from VISN 23 that the federal VA may be providing some additional funds to SVHs, but details of that are not known.

- 3) Has there been changing in staff in any of the Homes during the pandemic? Reduced or more hires?

We have had to hire additional temporary staff. Specifically, as we had direct care staff going out for symptoms and pending testing of COVID – we had temporary staff fill behind. We also created new positions – one example being screeners who are at the front door and screen all staff upon entering the facility for their shift. There have also been several staff that are out due to granted ADA accommodations. This has caused us to increase OT and in some cases increase contract workers, both of which cause an additional burden on the budget.

- 4) Are family members allowed to visit their loved ones in the Veterans Home? Does the Homes have the means for virtual meeting for residents?

We have had visitor restrictions in place since mid-March. In the past week, MDH has released guidance for window visits and outdoor visits. The guidance is very stringent and we are working on putting that into place currently in all homes. Over the past several months, we have focused on providing virtual visits between families and Veterans. We purchased over 30 iPads for all of the homes and we have facilitated thousands of iPad visits over the past several months between families and residents. However, as mentioned previously all homes are working on safe in-person visits that should begin in the next couple of weeks.

- 5) If families are not allowed, what needs to happen to the situation to allow families into the homes?

At this time, we are following the guidance from MDH regarding restricted visitors, which means no visitors inside of SVHs. It is a very difficult balance between maintaining good infection control protocols and allowing visitors. This circumstance is the same for all senior healthcare facilities in the state. To allow inside visits, this will take the MDH to allow those, which likely will not happen, possibly for another year.

- 6) Which Veterans Homes currently have residents with COVID-19? Total number of residents that have or had COVID-19? How many staff have been diagnosed with COVID-19?

We encourage you to go to the Medicare website – Nursing



Home Compare. There is a new reporting feature on that site that provides data regarding COVID and in each home – all that are certified by CMS. We also facilitate a daily COVID-19 Information line for families and stakeholders. In this recorded message, we provide the total number of cases that we currently have on campus.

Minneapolis is the only home that has had positive exposure of COVID-19 for both residents and staff. All other homes have remained COVID free. We are happy to report that Minneapolis is also now COVID free.

#### 7) Any deaths in the Homes? Veterans or staff?

We have had deaths relating to COVID – and currently since the start of the pandemic, we have had 10 Veterans die related to COVID. In all of those deaths, there were several other co-morbidities that contributed.