



The American Legion's Minnesota Dept. of Veterans Affairs Commissioners Meeting

Date: Jan 10, 2020

Location: Apple Valley American Legion

Dept. Rehab Committee Members: Wilson Spence, Gary Munkholm, Bill Brockberg, 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, Gary Munkholm and Jeremy Wolfsteller, Dept. Commander, Dept. Adjutant, Dan Ludwig, Commissioner Herke, Deputy Commissioners Hughes and Lindsay, Senior Director of the Homes, Simone Hogan.



MDVA MISSION:

The mission of Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) is “Dedicated to serving Minnesota Veterans and their families.” We are a “post wartime agency” and were created by the 1943 state Legislature to consolidate the services provided to service members, and since 2007, we have operated the Minnesota Veterans Homes. Today, there are approximately 308,000 veterans in Minnesota.

Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs Overview

The mission of Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) is “Dedicated to serving Minnesota Veterans and their families.” We are a “post wartime agency” and were created by the 1943 state Legislature to consolidate the services provided to service members, and since 2007, we have operated the Minnesota Veterans Homes. Today, there are more than 308,000 veterans in Minnesota (about six percent of the state’s population. Veterans face many challenges including translating their military skills and experiences to civilian occupations, unemployment and underemployment, and short- and long-term medical issues resulting from their military duty. In addition, many veterans and their families experience both mental fatigue and physical injuries associated with military deployments. Finally, approximately 23 percent of the state’s population aged 65 and older are veterans, many with unique long-term care needs.

AGENCY AT A GLANCE

- Long-term, Skilled nursing and Domiciliary care
 - Adult Day Center and resources for caregivers
 - Education and employment services
 - Federal VA Claims and outreach services
- Homeless Veteran prevention and assistance services
 - State benefits (State Soldiers Assistance Program)
- Operates 5 State Veterans Homes and 3 State Veterans Cemeteries
 - Serve more than 308,000 Veterans in Minnesota
 - Employ approximately 1,400 staff statewide

Programs & Service Division (PSD)

- MDVA administers the following programs to meet the needs of eligible veterans, their dependents and survivors. Veterans Services, consisting of the Claims and Field Operations staff represent veterans and their family members by acting as their advocate in matters pertaining to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits and entitlements. This division consists of the St. Paul and Fargo Claims offices, the Gold Star Families and Women’s Program, Tribal Veterans Service Officers, and Veterans Outreach.

- Veterans Employment and Education Division helps veterans and eligible family members navigate the complicated higher educational benefits system and promotes employment and self-sufficiency for those individuals. This division includes the Higher Education Veterans Program, enforces the state Veterans Preference Acts as the State Approving Agency (SSA) and administers the Minnesota GI Bill.
- Memorial Affairs assures that Veterans and their families are honored with final resting places that have national significance and lasting tributes that commemorate their service and sacrifice to our nation. The division operates three veterans' cemeteries, one in Little Falls, Preston and the newly opened facility in Duluth. It also manages the Military Funeral Honors Stipend Program and the Bronze Star Marker Program.
- State Veterans Benefits Division provides programs and services unique to Minnesota's Veterans and supplements certain federal programs. The division manages the State Soldiers Assistance Program, LinkVet, Minnesota Service C.O.R.E., Minnesota Operation for Veterans Empowerment (MOVE) and Veterans Preference. The Homeless veterans works directly with all key partners throughout Minnesota and leads the implementation of the goal in the State Plan to End Veteran Homelessness on a Veteran by Veteran basis. The SSI/SSDI, Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) team assist homeless and at risk veterans in obtaining social security disability benefits.
- MDVA Grant Programs provide needed funding to our partners who assist us in our goals of serving veterans. - Veterans Service Organizations (VSO) Grants are provided to Congressionally Chartered Veterans Service Organizations in Minnesota to assist veterans and their families receive all the federal, state, and local benefits they are entitled to. - County Veterans Service Officers (CVSO) Grants are provided to all 87 counties to provide outreach for the reintegration of combat veterans into society, to collaborate with social service agencies, educational institutions, and other community organizations to enhance services offered to veterans, to reduce homelessness, and to enhance the operations of the county veterans service office. Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans (MACV), funded through a grant from MDVA, aids throughout Minnesota to veterans and their families who are homeless or in danger of homelessness. Support Our Troops Grants are competitive grants provided to eligible foundations and other organizations approved by the Commissioner, whose purpose is supporting and improving the lives of veterans and their families. These grants are funded through the Support Our Troops License Plate Account.

State Veterans Homes

The Homes provide care that is designed and delivered according to the individual needs of each resident. The Homes have the goal of restoring, optimizing and or maintaining each resident's level of function, personal autonomy, and dignity while recognizing the individual's service to the country.

This goal is achieved through facilities that provide skilled nursing care with special care units for the treatment of Dementia and Alzheimer's, Domiciliary Care (board and care) and Adult Day Care services. In addition, they provide the following programs or services:

- occupational
- physical therapy
- physical fitness
- social services
- recreational therapy
- behavioral services
- transportation
- volunteer programs
- drug and alcohol treatment
- work therapy
- dental
- optometry care
- primary medical care

In recent years, The Agencies Homes have undergone several changes to improve the quality of care being provided. These changes include, Implementation of resident-centered care models at all the Veterans Homes to meet the unique individualized care of Veteran. A new building at the Minneapolis campus, and additional clinical training for the staff through a community partnership with Twin Cities Healthcare partnership (TCHP). Compliance with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) standards for the purpose of enhancing the level of care provided at the Veterans Homes and generating an opportunity to bill services to the federal government under the Medicare insurance programs.

The Minneapolis Adult Day was recognized with a 2016 -State Government Innovation Award for their project called Operation Sight and Sound. The Silver Bay Veterans Home was recognized in 2015 with a State Continuous Improvement Award for their interdisciplinary teamwork and the improved beneficial resident outcomes related to behaviors and reducing psychotropic medication use. This project included additional staff training on dementia care with the Gemini program and the implementation of new life enrichment coordinators. Establishment, in 2014, the ongoing work of a Commissioners Healthcare Task Force to provide guidance for best practices and programming for our Veterans Homes, which has proved to be a valuable resource to our agency leadership.

FY20 Rehabilitation Meeting with MDVA Commissioners

Meeting Minutes:

- **MDVA Biennial Budget**
 - MDVA works off a 2-year biennium budget and currently a quarter of the way through their FY2020-21 Biennial Budget. MDVA Deputy Commissioner provided updates regarding their current operating budget status and FY2020-21 Biennial Budget Change Items.
 - Minnesota's capital budget is primarily funded by issuing state general obligation bonds. Items funded in capital budgets often include land acquisition, repair, renovation and construction of state facilities; acquisition, construction and repair of state parks, trails, interpretive centers, campground facilities, forests, wildlife management areas, dams and flood control structures.
 - Minnesota Management & Budget issues instructions for capital budget requests in April of the year preceding its submission to the Legislature. Preliminary submissions of state agency capital budget requests are due in June, with final submissions due in September. The Governor's submits a proposed capital budget to the Legislature in January of even-numbered years.
- **MDVA Programs & Services Division (PSD) Budget Breakdown**
 - The MDVA Agency has submitted a capital bonding request of \$37 million to Minnesota Management & Budget primarily for asset preservation of its 5 state Veterans Homes. The Governor's Office has responded to the agency's capital bonding request and included \$15 million dollars in Governor Walz's "Local Jobs and Projects Plan". An additional 3.1-million-dollar supplemental funding request was submitted for the agencies mission to help end veteran's homelessness.
 - Claims Division
 - Fargo, St. Paul Claims Offices and Field Operations remain to be funded for 33 FTE; budget will remain with no increases.
 - State Cemeteries
 - Currently on VA's waiting list for the agencies 4th State Veterans Cemetery that will be in Redwood Falls, MN. Redwood County has a tentative purchase agreement for the land they're prepared to donate to MDVA for the cemetery in Redwood Falls. Federal funding for FY20 that could have went to MN instead went to Oklahoma, a state without any veteran cemeteries.
 - The cost for operating a new cemetery would be added to the biennial budget request for the year of projected completion. Anticipated cost to run a new cemetery has not been projected.

FY20 Rehabilitation Meeting with MDVA Commissioners

Meeting Minutes continued:

- MN CORE Program
 - Inception 2008-09. The agency has a contract with Lutheran Social Services to provide mental health and financial counseling services to MN veterans that may not have access to VA healthcare or prefer not using the federal facilities.
 - Previous years funding for the biennium was \$1M, \$500,000 per year.
 - Starting FY20 and ongoing the agency received a large increase in funding of \$250,000 each year for the LSS CORE Program.

- Homeless program
 - 56 veterans were added to the registry and in December 47 were housed, but the registry has been totaling 295 veterans for the last few months.

 - Local twin cities area struggling with availability for places to rent. Landlords don't need to take a subsidized rate because of demand for housing. Additionally, these last few veterans tend to have multiple barriers such as criminal history and poor rental history.

 - VA point in time count (PIT) dictates how many HUDVASH vouchers each medical center receives which assists placing homeless veterans into subsidized housing and reducing the registry list.

 - \$3.1 million supplemental budget request for non-VHA eligible veterans that can access HUDVASH vouchers.

- SSAP
 - The State's Soldiers Assistance Program (SSAP) is maintaining with the current budget allocations. Funding allocations FY19 was \$4.61M and remains.

- Higher Education
 - MN GI Bill has an open appropriation of up to \$6 million per year, annual funding is based on the previous year's expenditures and any projected increase/decreases.

 - The agency disbursed \$2.9M in MN GI Bill usage for Higher Education and saw a 5.8% increase in expenditures.

FY20 Rehabilitation Meeting with MDVA Commissioners Cont.

Meeting Minutes Cont.

- **MDVA State Veterans Policy Breakdown as it is related to upcoming pending Veteran legislation**

Revisor #/File Requested	Agency Tracking #	Proposal Title	Brief Description
Yes	5603	Providing dental services to eligible Veterans	Amend Minnesota Statutes 198.006 to add statutory authority to provide a dental clinic and dental services to both MVH resident & certain non-resident Veterans (like VA dental care-eligible Veterans).
Yes	5604	Allowing homeless Veterans data to be shared	Amend Minnesota Statutes 196.08 to incorporate Data Practices language providing the ability to share homeless veteran data found on the MDVA Homeless Veteran Registry
Yes	5605	Providing adult day care services to eligible Veterans	Amend Minnesota Statutes 198.006 to provide explicit statutory authority to operate and manage the Adult Day Center.

Total Request: ~~\$37.4~~\$15 Million

Priority	Proposal Title	Brief Description (with Gov’s Recommendations)
1.	Statewide Security Upgrades	\$8.4 \$4.2 Million to improve security & safety of MDVA facilities statewide for our residents, families, guests and staff.
2.	Asset Preservation	\$14 \$10.7 Million to address 117 MDVA facility systems receiving ‘Poor’ or ‘Crisis/Failure’ ratings in the most recent Facility Condition Audit (FCA) – completed Sept. 2019
3.	Minneapolis Veterans Home Building 6	\$12 Million (represents 35% state match) to conduct a major renovation of a historic building on the MVH Minneapolis campus. The facility update would add a minimum of 36 new skilled nursing beds, meeting current skilled nursing care models.
4.	Campus Enhancements	\$3,173,920 (total request)
	i. Replacement of Bldg. 34 at MVH Hastings	\$2,131,660 to complete hazardous materials abatement and demolish building 34 at MVH – Hastings and to design, construct and equip a vehicle storage and service building and associated site improvements.
	ii. Demolition of Bldg. 13 at MVH Mpls.	\$82,260 to complete hazardous materials abatement and demolish building 13 at MVH – Minneapolis.
	iii. Construct replacement Storage Building 2 at MVH Fergus Falls	\$960,000 to complete hazardous materials abatement and demolish building 2 at MVH – Fergus Falls and to design, construct and equip a storage building and associated site improvements.
5.	Fergus Falls Green House	\$100,000 to finalize funding for constructing a detached, freestanding structure, to include electrical and plumbing. A permanent green house has been sought by residents for more than 4 years and has received vigorous support and financial contributions from the Fergus Falls Veterans community.

Retain funds remaining under the MVH – Mpls Truss Bridge Project appropriation for Asset Preservation

Add the following language to the “back of the bill” list on the final bonding bill:

“The unspent portion of this appropriation after the project has been substantially completed, upon written notice to the commissioner of management and budget, is available for asset preservation under Minnesota Statutes, section 16B.307. Minnesota Statutes, section 16A.642, applies from the date of the original appropriation to the unspent amount transferred.”

New Home Updates

- Federal Funding from the recently passed federal legislation - \$90M was the total dollar amount in the bill for the entire country.
 - List priority order submitted to VA
 - Bemidji \$42M Total Cost
 - Montevideo \$48M Total Cost
 - Preston \$32M Total Cost

- Total MN New Veterans Home Projects total \$112M, were all be funded by the Federal VA Construction Program, MN would need \$79 of the \$90M

- Suicide prevention program initiative – currently Paula Newinski, MDVA Quality Director, is leading the effort. She has attended and will be attending events around the state. MDVA is now part of the MDH suicide prevention task force, as well as part of the federal VA task force. MDVA plans to hire a suicide prevention coordinator and liaison to lead the agency’s efforts. Goal for MDVA for the state is in line with the federal VA initiative.

- Marketing of HST’s CAN’s on Billboard – currently as part of the Homes recruitment effort includes billboards in both Fergus Falls and Silver Bay. This year there is a renewed effort to have a comprehensive recruitment and retention effort for all the homes. Other areas include tuition reimbursement, referral bonus and education opportunities.

- Hastings Veterans Home and ending veteran homelessness – Administrator of the MDVA Doms program has been working with MDVA P&S to assist in placing homeless Veterans in the program. Doms is not a dedicated homeless program, but where the Veteran and the program are a match, MDVA will work with P&S. There have been two successful placements of homeless Veterans, one came from a shelter, the other from the Drake Hotel fire. Note: Veterans must be committed to be drug and alcohol free and working in one of the three Doms programs, the goal to achieve the highest level of independence possible

Rehab Chairman: *Wilson Spence*

DSO & Rehab Secretary: *Jeremy Wolfsteller*