

VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION WEEKLY UPDATE

Week Ending — 5/01/2020

Health Policy

Meeting

- April 27 – Deputy Director attended meeting about State run Vet Centers and Testing Processes with VA
 - Issues discussed included
 - How each state is reporting Covid-19 cases
 - What types of funding are VA state run centers being funded in order to obtain PPE, staffing, and other medical needs?
 - How do VA state run centers compare to privately run or other non-vet run centers?
- April 27 – Deputy Director attended meeting to discuss the PCAFC proposed eligibility evaluation/reassessment process
 - Discussion centered around the major issues with S785 (Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019)
 - Assessment, reassessment, and appeals were at the forefront of the conversation as major issue with moving forward on support for the bill
- April 29 – Deputy and Health Policy Coordinator attended VSO conference call regarding VA Caregiver Reform Regulation
 - Bob Carey, Chief Advocacy Officer at The Independence Fund led the meeting to discuss issues brought up in Mondays meeting
 - The two biggest concerns for The Independence Fund with the NPRM are:
 - The lack of specificity with regards to the initial eligibility assessment process, the reassessment process to maintain eligibility, and the appeals processes. Not only is TIF concerned the processes should be spelled out in the regulation, given the failures of VA Central Office to impose policy and program execution standardization through policy documents in the past, but that the reassessment and appeals processes aren't even determined yet
 - The requirement caregivers must personally deliver all assistance to the veteran, effectively precluding caregivers from working outside the home

- April 30 – Deputy and Health Policy Coordinator attended VSO conference call regarding VA Caregiver Reform Regulation
 - This meeting was a follow up to the meeting on April 29th.
 - The purpose of this meeting was to finalize the main issues to be brought forward in a letter drafted by Bob Carey for the purpose of requesting more time from the VA and from OMB to solidify the processes of assessment, reassessment, and appeal of the VA Caregiver Reform Regulation

- April 30 – Deputy and Health Policy Coordinator attended a check in for the VAVS
 - This meeting was held to check in on VSO Volunteers amid Covid 19
 - Tony Burley addressed all members concerns
 - Mostly consisted of good news stories and providing information on where to receive extra support and supplies for veterans during Covid 19

- May 1 – Toxic Exposure and the American Military (TEAM)
 - TEAM DoD Potential Bill review of issues
 - Derek Fronabarger from Wounded Warrior Project along with TEAM has put together a review of items they wish to see addressed in a Toxic Exposure Bill to include support and issues along with comments for rewording and whether or not each organization supports or opposes each suggested item

- May 1 – Deputy attended the VSO COVID 19 update
 - Rene Campos – Senior Director of Government Relations for Veterans Wounded Warrior Care held this meeting to discuss the Senate Democrats’ Proposal for Pandemic Premium Pay to Reward, Retain, & Recruit Essential Workers
 - Many participates talked about the issues of supply shortages, obtaining supplies from outside the VA supply chain, having to make do with what they have on hand
 - Another major issue was trying to find a way to retain health care providers after the pandemic is over which is what the proposal covers

System Worth Saving (SWS) – no changes since last week

	Preparation	Completed Site Visit	Writing Draft	Chairman Edits	Facility Edits	Final Edits	Website	Published
VA Medical Center, Martinsburg, WV	X	X	P					

VA Illiana Health Care System, Danville, IL	X	X	X	X	P			
Washington DC VA Medical Center, Washington, DC	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Lexington VA Health Care System, Lexington, KY	X	X	X	X	X	X	P	
W.G. (Bill) Hefner VA Medical Center, Salisbury, NC	X	X	P					
Central Alabama Veterans Health Care, Montgomery, AL	X	X	P					

X= Complete P= in Process

- Health Policy Coordinator(s) continued to analyze SWS’s In-facility and Mail-Out Question Bank for the MISSION Act of 2018.

Claims Services

Upcoming Memorial Day ceremonies

With Memorial Day less than a month away, the National Cemetery Administration reports “it is too early to know whether large events can be held safely in late May.” The American Legion’s liaison at NCA reported April 29 that plans for Memorial Day ceremonies “are being flushed out right now” and Legion leadership would be advised “as soon as we know for sure.”

The NCA continues to monitor guidance from the Centers for Disease and Control, as well as state and local officials, to inform its decision on Memorial Day activities. Regardless of whether a cemetery holds a public ceremony, VA national cemeteries will observe Memorial Day in some fashion.

Update of NCA on committal services

The National Cemetery Administration reported April 23 that normal committal services remain cancelled. Mourners can witness burials or inurnments from their vehicles.

Funeral services with military honors are still being postponed. NCA is making arrangements to render military honors at a later date with family members.

Floral arrangements continue to be handled between families and their funeral directors, who personally deliver flowers to the cemeteries.

Cancellation of BVA In-person Hearings extended through June 1

In keeping with VA's primary mission to care for our veterans, the Board of Veterans' Appeals has suspended all video and Central Office hearings through June 1, 2020.

However, the BVA and U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims remain open and are processing appeals.

The BVA is requesting that VSOs contact veterans scheduled for Board hearings during the month of May. The appellants should be offered the options of 1) rescheduling an in-person hearing, 2) arranging for a virtual hearing, or 3) withdrawing from the hearing altogether.

BVA – Indianapolis & Washington, D.C. Board Units (combined)

- Legacy Appeals	1765
- Board Unit Inventory (AMA Appeals)	1792
o Pending 125 Days+	290
- Informal Hearing Presentations (IHP) prepared	327
- Memos generated	5
- Phone inquiries	138
- Quality Reviews	260
- Individual Training	39.25 hours
- Team Training	3.75 hours
- Hearings	1
- Board Dispositions	253
o Appeals granted	85 (33.6%)
o Remanded	112 (44.3%)
o Denied	49 (19.4%)
o Other	7 (2.8%)

Senior Veterans Disability Claims Specialists

- Compensation & Pension Claims	18
- Discharge Upgrades	1
- Other Issues	8
- Contacts	42

Veterans Benefits

Meetings

- April 28 – Veterans Benefits Coordinators participated in VSO Discussion with area VSO's to include DAV, MOAA, VVA, PVA and VFW and regarding the elimination of public-facing DBQ's
 - Determined whether public-use disability benefits questionnaires continue to be an effective means of gathering evidence to support claims for benefit entitlement and, if necessary, take steps to discontinue their use
 - Eliminating DBQs from public use creates inequity and disparity within the claims process
 - Veterans should be able to have private DBQs completed via telehealth
 - Exempting DBQs from the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995
 - Revise public-use disability benefits questionnaire forms to include a mechanism for the private provider to indicate whether the examination was completed in person or through telehealth

- May 1 – Veterans Benefits Coordinators participated in meeting, via video conference, with Bergmann & Moore to discuss summer DSO school
 - Discussed survey questions to be submitted to DSO's to determine what better ways to improve upon DSO Schools
 - Discussed IT issues with DSO school and how to streamline procedures
 - Reviewed and approved the draft agenda for the TAL DSO Virtual Course set for August 2020

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End of VA&R weekly update – 5/01/2020