

## VHMAC-ST Meeting Minutes (20 January 2021)

**I. Call to Order** - Council Chair Dr. Dave La Pointe called to order the regular meeting of the Veterans' Healthy Minds Advisory Council- South Texas, at 1102 on 20 January 2021, via Zoom video/tele-conference.

Council roll was called by Council Secretary Karah Smith.

**Roll Call**— Present or Excused: Carlos Acosta, David La Pointe, Gingerlei Seda, Karah Smith, Kesha Delasbour, Kevin Crozier, Larissa Martinez, Leah Whitmire, Lisa Firmin, Michael Carrion, Natasha Walden, Wil Seda, Dr. Betsy Davis, Stacy Hicks, Stella Newberger-VA caregiver support, Becki Williams, Rebecca Voelker.

Not Present: Andrea Strong, Christopher Vidaurre, Jill Palmer, Jose Gonzales, Michael O'Connell, Robin Soto

### II. Approval/Review of Previous Minutes/Current Agenda

Council Chair Dr. La Pointe motioned to accept previous meeting minutes. Motion seconded by Kevin and approved at 1104.

Started council with New Business due to having presenters (time constraints)

### III. New Business

**VHMACST— Guest Speaker Alisa H. Cordero, LCSW, Caregiver Support Coordinator**-was not available but Stella and Rebecca discussed the program. Presenters discussed the requirements for the PCAFC and the two-tier system that is currently in place. Caregiver support program started in 2002, and as of October 1<sup>st</sup> of 2020 they are now able to serve folks who served on or before May 7, 1975. The lower level requires supervision, protection, or instruction for at least 1 ADL each time it is performed, and the higher tier is needing supervision, protection, or instruction for 3 activities each time it is performed. They have seen a lot of interest in the program and received about 900 applications since October 1, 2021. Applications are processed on a first come, first served basis. They are processing as fast as they can but are uncertain of the time required to process an application sent in today. They are still accepting referrals at this time. You may contact them directly with the information of someone interested in the program. The person must be enrolled in VA and enrolled in primary care (having at least 1 visit with primary care annually). They can also apply online.

Questions and responses from the presentation:

Kevin asked about desert storm vets-looks like it will open for them in 2 years. Working on a staggered form. Stella from VA discussed what is involved in general program-Goal is to make sure caregivers have support that they need. Available to veterans of all eras. No monetary compensation for this program. They offer groups, trainings, connect to community partners, they make contact at least once a year to caregivers, they are here to focus on the needs of the caregiver and to advocate for the caregivers. Phone number to enrollment and eligibility 210-949-3994 option 2 for new patient appointments can also get you sign up with a new PCP. If it has been more than 2 years you may have been discontinued to PCP program and will need to re-enroll. The dream is 90 days from application to having a response. Currently, that is not the case. They are working on the applications on a first come first served basis-as it is received.

Stacy discussed that she lives far away from a VA and the inconsistency of the VA care they receive. Rebecca provided the national caregiver support line, who answers is paid to answer and they will connect you to the local office-1-855-260-3274. Stacy discussed that the services she has received when calling that line has been less

than ideal with the services she has received. Rebecca discussed that the VA provider who spoke to Stacy should be reported. Stella reports that it is a focus to have each VA do things to a national standard so that things are similar in different VA's. The hope is that they are breaking down some distance barriers. Rebecca offered that someone having issues can reach out to her and she will set up a warm hand-off. Multiple people in the chat discussed that they have had connectivity issues with the VA system this week. Rebecca stated that the VA system is changing over the phone system and that might be causing some of the issues. Larissa asked if there is an option for text or chat-Rebecca reports that the veteran crisis line offers text but not that the caregiver support line. Leah states that information about the program needs to be put out more as she was not even aware of the existence of the program. Dave-will be adding the information to the website. Slides will be sent to Dr. La Pointe. **(Open)**

- ✓ **VHMACST— Guest Speaker Leah Whitmire and Stacy Hicks-** Leah Whitmire & Stacy Hicks, “Is the VA Failing Our Veterans?” ([Leahmariew@hotmail.com](mailto:Leahmariew@hotmail.com)). Stacy discussed that **loving my vets** is a program that she runs, she sent out an email asking participants how is your connections with the VA? She has over 200 examples of how the VA is not providing the support that is needed. Discussed a few examples of information gathered. Lisa asked what Stacy is going to do with the information gathered. Stacy has sent it to the head of the VA but due to the recent changes in VA leadership there is a holding pattern right now. Leah discussed that children of veterans are not represented and not supported. Leah discussed that a lot of community resources are only focusing on Post 9/11. Leah discussed how the divorce rate continues to increase due to the MH issues related to military service and that she runs into issues when she is trying to share information with her husband's provider due to HIPAA. Leah gave personal examples of concerns with the VA care. Stacy discussed that some of the leaders of MH services cannot agree on what constitutes PTSD. Stacy states that the family is often not engaged in supportive services. Lisa-asked how can we help? Can we have some of the information that we can share? Stacy email [lovingmyveteran@gmail.com](mailto:lovingmyveteran@gmail.com)

Dave discussed the Veteran Spouses Network. Leah states that the veteran spouse resiliency group is great. Karah asked Stacy if there have been any positive responses that have shown any kind of consistency. Dr. Davis offered Stacy that she will reach out to assist with the particular case that Stacy discussed.

- ✓ Upcoming Training; None at this time
- ✓ Upcoming Events; None at this time
- ✓ Other

#### **IV. Old Business**

**VHMACST— Veteran Resilience and Recovery Operation/ Collaborative.** Updates due to COVID-19, not a lot has changed. Dr. Davis will send out the updates. Discussed how to connect with veterans in non-polarized or politicized places. Clarity guidance center has a set of parenting seminars coming up that Dr. Davis will send to council. **(Open).**

**VHMACST— Women Veterans Sub-Committee.** Col. Lisa Firmin discussed another death related to MST at Ft Bliss-Asia Graham, not in a lot of press, similar to Vanessa Guillen, went to chain of command and was told to not talk about it. Spoke with MST coordinator with the VA and will be planning an MST education and awareness campaign. She is looking at hosting several events for education and awareness. Events will be added to the website. Brainstorming session taking place today and Col. Firmin may be reaching out to look for experts in certain fields. **(Open)**

**VHMACST— Outreach Sub-Committee.** Wil and Mike had to disconnect from the meeting early. Three new people that are being monitored by council. 1 is terminally ill and is requesting changes to his home. Wil and another veteran put in a door and they are getting steps delivered so that he can get outside. He does have family living with him. They are connecting him to burial assistance information. Vietnam veteran is now in a wheelchair and is rated at 30% and will be connecting him with possible services; possible HISA, as well as SAH and SHA grants and other benefits he may be entitled to.

- “Check-In” Program-
- “Nextdoor Community” Program **(In-work)** Dr. La Pointe reports the Nextdoor communication that they want to use is complete and we are waiting on it to be approved and then it will be sent out. **(Open)**

**Mental Health First Aid Training.** Larissa has a grant to allow some scholarships for veterans and family that are over 18 years old. They are for March. She is working on having a more consistent schedule. She has recently trained Leah as an instructor. Larissa discussed if anyone is still waiting for a certificate, she will send a paper copy if you email her **(Open)**

**VHMACST—Budget.** VA Rep Dr. Davis discussed there are no updates **(Open)**

**VHMACST-MH Leadership Service Improvement. (Dr. Davis)** She sent up what she received from Leah, found a video to update MyHealthyVet.com and posted the video that the VA is posting to Facebook. Also wanted to share that we were able to get a video posted on the STX VA FB and twitter pages on how to upgrade MyHealthVet account virtually: <https://www.facebook.com/SanAntonioVAMC/>, based on council feedback/suggestions, so THANKS!

**VHMACST— Resource Guide.** Dr. La Pointe is putting his best effort to have a complete resource guide at next month’s meeting. **(Open)**

#### **VHMACST— Other/Miscellaneous**

- ✓ Kevin discussed that there are a lot of virtual events on the website from Endeavors.
- ✓ Larissa discussed that the Hiking Heroes is doing well, and they now have 3 events scheduled. They are now starting a service “when you both wear the boots in the marriage.” Col. Firmin will add the hiking information to send to the student veteran.
- ✓ Dave discussed the flu shot information that you can print it out and get a free flu shot.
- ✓ Dr. Davis announced the VA speaker for February is from the Burn Pit Registry; people who were exposed to burn pits overseas. It will be a VA local person who can discuss how to register and what benefits are available.
- ✓ Dave will send out new member listing with minutes.

#### **V. Next Meeting**

17 February 2021; 1100; Phone-In/ Video Teleconference (due to COVID-19 concerns and restrictions).

#### **VI. Adjournment**

Meeting ended at 1217-did not officially adjourn or second this meeting.

#### **VII. End of Minutes**

Minutes submitted by Council Secretary, Karah Smith.

Minutes will be reviewed by Council Chair, David LaPointe.