

BYLAWS

ARTICLE I-NAME

The name of the Council will be the Veterans' Healthy Minds Advisory Council - South Texas (VHMACST), hereafter referred to as the VHMACST, organization, Group or Board.

ARTICLE II-PURPOSE

Section 1. Mission Statement

The mission of the non-profit organization is to establish a true partnership between the Veterans and their families, Veterans Administration Mental Health Professionals, Community Partners, and Veteran Service Organizations (VSO), Non-Profits, NGOs, and any other organizations or functions in order to improve the quality of VA Mental Health Services, and to promote best use of those services.

Section 2. Functions

1. Educating Veterans, family members, VA staff and the community functions/organizations on issues and resources surrounding veteran mental.
2. Reducing barriers to accessing mental health services for Veterans and families, including stigma, lack of information about services, and difficulty navigating VA Mental Health systems.
3. Provide Veteran and other stakeholder (e.g., family members, caregivers, VSOs, community partners) input into VA mental health services.
4. Advocate for Veterans (collectively) as well as family members to the extent that is appropriate and pertinent to mental health issues.

ARTICLE III-SCOPE

1. The VHMACST is not a treatment group or a mutual support group. Individual concerns and grievances are beyond the scope of the organization and will be directed to appropriate options for assistance.
2. Sometimes treatment providers/options will be present at VHMACST meetings. Participants are asked to acknowledge the different role these providers are playing in the VHMACST. If a participant finds it difficult to differentiate between the relationships, the VHMACST encourages individuals to address this in order to not take away from the functions of the Council or compromise a healthy treatment relationship.
3. The VHMACST serves to conduct meetings where Veterans and other stakeholders congregate to discuss issues related to mental health and recovery, including the importance of community integration. As a result, the VHMACST will often focus on ways for Veterans to become more involved with their community in order to better assist other Veterans (and themselves as a result). If a member participates in a community activity, either one endorsed by the VHMACST or not, the VHMACST is not responsible for the individual and assumes no liability for the individual, as they are participating in this activity on a voluntary basis.

ARTICLE IV-MEMBERSHIP

Section 1. Membership Structure

VA Functional Advisors

VA Functional Advisors are current VA staff members who have valuable input for the organization based on their position within the VA but do not serve as Council members. These individuals:

1. do not vote or hold office
2. do not count toward quorum
3. only serve in this role as long as they are current VA employees

Members

The Board: The "Board" will consist of the following members:

Chairman (or Chairwoman as appropriate) of the Board
Executive Vice President

Secretary

Treasurer

Board Members

NOTE: Individuals can serve in more than one position at the same time.

VHMACST Members

Qualifications

Council members should be at least one of the following:

1. A consumer or former consumer of VA mental health services
2. A family member, broadly defined, of a VA mental health consumer
3. A member of a VSO with a vested interest in mental health issues
4. A member of a community mental health organization or advocacy group provided the organization or group promotes Veteran mental health and does not detract from the Veterans Administration Mission
5. A representative from other community organizations, such as employment and housing agencies, or other agencies that support Veterans' efforts to achieve positive outcomes
- Agency representatives and all members must be transparent regarding any potential conflict of interest or dual relationship concerns
6. * Agency representatives who serve on the VHMACST may not use the VHMACST to profit from the VHMACST
7. A written agreement delineating the roles and responsibilities of the agency representative while serving on the organization may be required
8. Veterans

NOTE: In order to maintain the full independence of the VHMACST, current VA employees are not eligible to be VHMACST Members. Members are expected to self-disclose current VA employment status.
NOTE: Individuals can serve in more than one position at the same time.

Members should reflect the diversity of Veterans and family members who receive services. Ideally, membership would include:

1. Diversity in age, race, gender, and mental health diagnosis
2. Individuals who have knowledge of the major mental health, service assistance programs
3. From various geographic areas in the area including Community Based Outpatient Clinics [CBOC], Vet Centers and any other facilities/functions
4. From all branches of service and that have served both in peacetime and time of conflict

The majority of all VHMACT members are Veterans and family members who have received or are receiving mental health services at the medical center or CBOCs.

Duties and Responsibilities

1. Regularly attend and participate in Group and organizational meetings and functions.
2. Assist officers in completing their duties as requested by the Chairman of the Board.
3. Complete tasks that the member has agreed to.

Appointment of New Members

Organization will have no target (numbers) membership. Members may be added or renewed to the Group in the following manner:

1. Candidates for membership can be nominated by any existing Council member or can be self-nominated and will be asked to complete a membership application
2. A nomination or nominee may be presented, to include the candidate's background, qualifications, and potential for contribution to the organization
3. The officers evaluate a candidate's suitability for membership to the organization
4. A simple majority is needed to accept a new member.

Council members will serve indefinitely from the date of acceptance to the Council. However, efforts will be made to ensure that new members are added on a regular basis and to ensure that there is continuity in the Group.

Resignation of Members

Members may resign from the organization at any time by providing either written notification or verbal notification to the Chairman of the Board or Executive Vice President.

Removal of Members

Members can be removed from the organization, committee, or other functions for any of the following reasons:

1. The member's status changes (see above qualifications and duties).
2. The member is no longer able to fulfill their responsibilities or has not been fulfilling their responsibilities.
3. The member's behavior is disruptive and limits the Group's ability to function in a cohesive and effective manner.

4. A member has not consistently attended meetings/functions/events (without prior notice of absence) or otherwise participated.

1. Oversees the development, implementation, and reporting of the Council's activities, including collaboration with Secretary on minutes and annual report.
2. Determines the agenda for Council meetings with input from the Council.
3. Conducts all Council meetings.
4. Serves as the official spokesperson for the Council.
5. Establishes and dissolves committees with a 2/3 vote of the Council.
6. Monitors and tracks all activities, progress, and unfinished Council business.
7. Responds to inquiries with the assistance from Council members.
8. Fills committee vacancies occurring during term in office with the consent of the Council.
9. Keeps record of history of Council activities to maintain continuity of Council operations over time.
10. Promotes and models professionalism and fosters positive working relationships within the council, with the liaison, members of the VA and the community.

Duties and Responsibilities

1. A current or former Veteran, VA mental health services consumer.
2. Possess leadership abilities.
3. Ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing.
4. Willingness to devote the necessary amount of time to this position.
5. Ability to work in partnership and collaboration with others.

Qualifications

Chairman of the Board

Section 3. Officer Qualifications and Duties

Chairman of the Board
 Executive Vice President
 Secretary
 Treasurer
 Board of Directors

The officers of the Group will consist of the following:

Officers are expected to disclose all possible conflicts of interest during election process, so that this can be considered before being elected. Officers are also expected to sign a written agreement to limit the impact of potential conflicts of interest on Group activities.

Section 2. Officers

1. The Chairman of the Board will ask the Board to review the membership of an individual.
2. The Chairman of the Board will present the reason for reviewing the individual's membership.
3. The individual should give reasons why he/she should not be removed.
4. The Council must then reach a simple majority vote in order to remove a member from the Group.

following manner:

Removal may occur only at a properly called meeting of the Group. Removal of members will be conducted in the following manner:
 In these instances, the Chairman of the Board will notify the member of possible removal and give an opportunity to take corrective action if appropriate.

1. Schedules and notifies members of all Group meetings.
2. Records minutes of Group meetings.
3. Sends meeting minutes and other communications to appropriate parties in a timely manner (within 1 week – to Chairman of the Board).
4. Attends all Group Meetings.
5. Assists Chairman of the Board in keeping record of history of Group activities to maintain continuity of Group operations over time.
6. Promotes and models professionalism and fosters positive working relationships within the group, with the liaisons, members of the VA, and any and all community partners or other organizations.

Duties and Responsibilities

1. A member of the Group.
2. Ability to effectively summarize meeting discussions to relevant minutes.
3. Ability to type, collate, copy, and distribute written materials.
4. Willingness to commit time to perform duties.
5. Ability to work in partnership and collaboration with others.

Qualifications

Secretary

1. Assists the Chairman of the Board in performing his or her duties.
2. Functions as Chairman of the Board in the absence of the Chairman of the Board.
3. Functions as Secretary in the absence of the Group Secretary.
4. Recruits volunteers for committees with help from Members.
5. Responds to inquiries with help from Members.
6. Attends all Group meetings.
7. Promotes and models professionalism and fosters positive working relationships within the group, with the liaisons, members of the VA, and any other community functions or organizations.

Duties and Responsibilities

1. A current or former Veteran, or family member of consumer of VA MH services
2. Possess leadership abilities.
3. Ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing.
4. Willingness to devote the necessary amount of time to this position.
5. Ability to work in partnership and collaboration with others.

Qualifications

Executive Vice President

11. Works to actively solicit input from all members of council.
12. Only votes as needed to break a tie vote.

Qualifications

1. A member of the Group.
2. Ability to effectively summarize/maintain financial record for the Group.
3. Ability to type, collate, copy, and distribute any required financial documents for internal and external use as required by appropriate authorities.
4. Willingness to commit time to perform duties.
5. Ability to work in partnership and collaboration with others.

Duties and Responsibilities

1. Record/maintain/summarize any and all financial records required by Group or any other internal or external entity/institution concerning financial issues of the group.
2. Maintain checking/savings or any other accounts established by the Board of Directors.
3. Sign checks for funds to be used for approved expenditures by the Board of Directors. NOTE: Checks will require TWO signatures by a combination of Chairman of the Board, the Executive Vice President and/or the Treasurer.
4. Willingness to devote the necessary amount of time to this position.
5. Ability to work in partnership and collaboration with others.
6. Schedules and notifies members of all Group in need for financial concerns.
7. Record/maintain any and all financial documents of the group.
8. Sends all financial/banking documents and other communications received to Chairman of the Board as soon as they are received.
9. Attending all Group Meetings.
10. Assists Chairman of the Board in keeping record of history of Group activities to maintain continuity of Group operations over time.
11. Promotes and models professionalism and fosters positive working relationships within the Group, with the liaisons, members of the VA, and any other community partners and organizations.

Section 4. Elections and Transfer of Officers

General elections of all officers will occur in September or December of every two years. Newly appointed officers will co-conduct their duties with existing officers for a period of one month (typically September or December) in preparation for assuming their offices at the start of the fiscal or calendar year.

1. Candidates for office can be nominated by any existing Council member or can self-nominate.
2. Nominees can accept or decline the nomination.
3. A question-and-answer session will allow committee members to ask/answer questions of the nominees.
4. Nominees must be members in good standing with the Council and have attended all meetings in the three months prior to nominations (or provide prior notice of absence).
5. The written votes are tallied by a Group member, typically the Secretary (not a nominee); the nominee with the highest number of votes wins.

Section 5. Terms of Office

Each officer will serve for a term of two years, beginning upon election and extending for 12 calendar months (based on fiscal or calendar year). Officers may serve additional terms. VHMACT should have appropriate turnover to ensure both continuity and adding new ideas over time.

Regular meetings of the Council will be held, at a time and place designated by the Chairman of the Board. Special meetings of the Group may be called at any time by the Chairman of the Board with a reasonable notice to be membership. Special Meetings may be held in-person, by teleconference or video conference as deemed appropriate by the Chairman of the Board.

Section 1. Schedule

ARTICLE V-MEETINGS

1. Supports Group members in the development and maintenance of the Council.
2. Provides assistance to Group members and officers in furthering the mission of the Group as requested by the Group (e.g., helping link Group to relevant VA providers for information sharing).
3. Provides guidance and consultation to the Group in understanding and negotiating the VA system.
4. Facilitates communication with mental health and medical center leadership and the Group.

Duties and Responsibilities

1. The Local Recovery Coordinator (LRC) is identified as the staff liaison for the Group. In the event of his or her absence, a VA staff member, who understands the relationship between the mental health service line, facility, and Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) leadership, can fulfill this role.
2. Possess leadership abilities.
3. Ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing.
4. Ability to devote the necessary amount of time to this position.
5. Ability to work in partnership and collaboration with others.

Qualifications

Staff Liaison

Section 8. Liaison to the Group

The Group may grant prior approval of reasonable and necessary expenses incurred by members in the performance of their duties within the limits of currently available funds.

members of the Council will serve without pay.

Section 7. Compensation and Reimbursement The

A vacancy will exist whenever an officer resigns, is unable to continue, or is removed from the Group. To address vacancies, the Chairman of the Board will hold a special election to fill the vacancy.

Section 6. Vacancy

Work done in the name of the Group must be approved by the VHMACT.

Section 6: Protocol

Members agree to keep confidential the information discussed in the Group or committee meeting unless the Group states that specific information is to be shared (e.g., program/resource information, data gathering, surveys,).

Section 5. Confidential Communication

There will be no proxies for meetings/votes of the Group unless specifically approved by the Chairman of the Board. Members should be present in person or by phone to vote on any business of the Group. Reasonable accommodation will be made to allow members to vote via email, provided they give the Chairman of the Board or Executive Vice President at least three days' notice and receive approval in advance.

A quorum of the Group exists if a majority or more of the members are present. No actions requiring a vote may be passed at a meeting of the Council if a quorum is not reached.

Members are expected to attend all regular meetings of the Group. If unable to attend, members should notify the Chairman of the Board, Executive Vice President, or the Secretary to be excused. After three unexcused absences in a row, the Group can review the member's status. Multiple unexcused absences can result in removal from the Group.

Section 4. Attendance

Group members, liaisons, community partners or any may directly request the Chairman of the Board add new business items for placement on the agenda for a meeting.

The agenda for each meeting is determined by the Chairman of the Board with input from the Group and Staff Liaison, any other community partner, or any other organization.

Section 3. Agenda

The Secretary informs members and guests of the meeting schedules. The call for regular or special meetings of the Group will be posted on designated VHMACT Blogs, email accounts, websites, individual emailed and/or mailed to individuals or organizations on the Group mailing list at least 5 days prior to the meeting. The preferred method of communication shall be e-mail.

Section 2. Notice

Special Accommodation may be made to Veterans with specific disabilities based on the resources of the VA. Reasonable Accommodation shall be made for Group members with barriers to attending in person so that they may participate in regular meetings or special meetings, using remote meeting technology provided solely by the Group. VANTS conference line has been authorized via the Staff Liaison.

These Articles may be altered, amended, repealed, or replaced, and new Articles may be adopted by the membership of the Group. Such amendments require a two-thirds vote of the entire Board and officers.

ARTICLE X-AMENDMENTS

The Group will not discriminate in any regard with respect to race, color, creed, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, religion, national origin, ancestry, pregnancy, parenthood, physical disability, or mental disability.

ARTICLE IX-ANTI-DISCRIMINATION

The Secretary distributes minutes of Group meetings to all members and other designated parties within one week. Committees of the Group will report directly to the Council in a standard written format specifically designed for committee reporting. The Group periodically reports its requests, findings, and recommendations to VA facility leadership, which may include the facility Director, Mental Health Service Line Chiefs, and other appropriate staff. At the end of each fiscal year, the Council, in collaboration with Staff Liaison, drafts an annual report of its activities and accomplishments, which is distributed as appropriate, typically to the National Director, the facility Director, the Mental Health Service Line Chiefs and other key staff. Additionally, the Group has requirements to report to other community partners, legal partners, IRS, etc. The officers will be responsible for ensuring all appropriate reporting is complete to meet appropriate regulations/requirements.

ARTICLE VIII-REPORTING

- Respectful Communication: No shouting, interrupting, or side discussions while a member is speaking.
- Cell Phones: If cell phones must remain on, they should be placed on "vibrate." All calls should be answered outside the meeting room regardless of the length, or time of call.
- Responsibility: Members agree to complete task assignments as agreed.
- Disagreements: Members agree to constructively criticize an idea or solution without attacking or criticizing the person who offered it.
- Reasonable Accommodation: Members are aware of the needs of other members and make a reasonable effort to accommodate such needs.
- Feedback: Members agree to accept feedback from other members when asked and feedback must be given in a respectful and constructive manner.

ARTICLE VII-RULES OF CONDUCT

1. Committees may be formed to work on a specific initiative, issue, or problem.
2. Committees are led by Chairpersons, who are appointed by the Chairman of the Board, and committees report their information to the Group.
3. Members may volunteer to serve on committees. All group members are encouraged to serve on at least one committee.
4. Committees document and communicate progress and findings in short written reports to the Chairman of the Board.
5. Minutes of committee meetings will be distributed at the next regular meeting of the Group.
6. Committee Chairs are responsible for distribution of minutes and reporting of committee activities to the Chairman of the Board.

The Chairman of the Board may create, or dissolve committees as needed. Committees are structured as follows:

ARTICLE VI-COMMITTEES

VA Representatives: (NON-Voting Members)
Dr. Betsy Davis
Lakeisha Howard
Leah Smith

Angie Bukowski
Becki Williams
Carlos Acosta
Dr. David La Pointe
Edsel Thomas
Fred Thomas
John Nelson
Karah Smith
Kevin Crozier
Kristie Steinmeier
Larissa Martinez
Laura Knolls
Leah Whitmire
Priscilla Bell
Dr. Scott Rheinschmidt
Dr. Shirley Johnson
Troy McGrath

MEMBERS:

Dr. Shirley E. Johnson
Board Director

Angie Bukowski
Board Director

Carlos Acosta
Board Director

Dr. David A. La Pointe
Chairman of the Board, Founder,
Treasurer

Kevin S. Crozier
Board Director, Secretary, Web-Master,
Communications

Priscilla Bell
Board Director

Fred W. Thomas
Executive Vice President,
Non-Profit Program Manager