

**Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)  
Center for Development and Civic Engagement (CDCE)  
VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) National Advisory Committee (NAC)  
Executive Committee Meeting  
Tuesday, May 14, 2024 - 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.**

**Call to Order:** Joseph (Joe) Dooley, National Representative, United Veterans Services and Executive Committee (EC) Chair called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

**Invocation:** Richard Moore, Chief, Chaplain Service, VA St. Louis Health Care System provided the invocation.

**Pledge of Allegiance:** John Kleindienst, National Representative, Disabled American Veterans (DAV) led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Roll Call:** Vicki Sarracino, National Representative, Soldiers’ Angels, and EC Co-Chair performed roll call. Executive Committee attendance was recorded as follows:

	<b><u>Present (P)/ Absent (A)</u></b>	
American Gold Star Mothers	P	
American Legion	P	
American Legion Auxiliary	P	
AMVETS Auxiliary	P	
Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks	P	
Disabled American Veterans	P	
Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary	P	
Forty and Eight	P	
I.B.P.O. Elks of the World, Inc.	P	
Knights of Columbus	P	
Marine Corps League Auxiliary	P	
Military Women Across the Nation		A
National Society Daughters of the American Revolution	P	
Paralyzed Veterans of America	P	
Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing, Inc.	P	
Soldiers' Angels	P	
Sons of the American Legion	P	
United Veterans Services	P	
Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary	P	
Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S.	P	

**VA and Other Staff Present:**

William Ball, Chief, CDCE, VA Palo Alto Health Care System and Field Advisor  
John P. (J.P.) Brown, AMVETS, President, James H. Parke Memorial  
Scholarship Board  
Sabrina C. Clark, Ph.D., Director, VA CDCE, VA Central Office (VACO) and

Designated Federal Officer

Cesar Emano, Chief, CDCE, VA Maine Health Care System

Ann Glende, Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary, and Treasurer, Parke Board

Mitra Gobin-Wade, Administrative Officer, VA CDCE, VACO

Tyrone Green, Program Analyst, VA CDCE, VACO

Marcena C. Gunter, Chief, CDCE, VA St. Louis Health Care System

Virginia (Ginny) Hoover, Program Analyst, VA CDCE, VACO

Jeffrey Moragne, Director, Advisory Committee Management Office (ACMO)

Karen O'Neal, Chief, CDCE, Erie VA Medical Center (VAMC) and Co-Chair, Partnership Subcommittee

Kevin Stanford, DHA, MBA, Acting Deputy Director, VA CDCE, VACO

Wesley Walls, Communications Specialist, VA CDCE, VACO

Michael White, MSW, LICSW, CAVS, Chief, CDCE, Louis A. Johnson VA Medical Center

Nathan Witt, Program Analyst, VA CDCE, VACO

**Host Welcome:** Marcena Gunter welcomed attendees to St. Louis for the 78<sup>th</sup> Annual VAVS NAC. She highlighted activities sponsored by VA St. Louis Health Care System's local VAVS Committee's Executive Committee including the Taste of Saint Louis event, and shared additional opportunities for conference attendees to take part in such as Photos Under the Gateway Arch. EC members thanked Marcena given the relative short time her and the St. Louis CDCE team had to prepare to host the annual conference and meeting.

**78th Annual Meeting Agenda Overview:** Joe Dooley outlined the EC meeting agenda and there were no revisions.

**Review Goals & Objectives and Fall EC Minutes:** Joe Dooley reviewed the goals and objectives for the 78th Annual NAC meeting.

1. Provide the VAVS NAC an opportunity to conduct its business in a manner that assures achievement of all responsibilities mandated by its charter.
2. Provide NAC orientation to local and national VAVS Representatives and Deputy Representatives and VA CDCE staff.
3. Present to all member organization representatives an overview of current and pending VAVS/CDCE policies and procedures.
4. Foster full and open communication among the member organizations, their representatives, and CDCE staff in VA Central Office and in the field.
5. Provide the NAC member organizations with the educational and training programs designed to share information geared towards improving volunteer programs with special emphasis on methods to recruit, retain, motivate, and recognize volunteers.
6. Furnish NAC member organizations the opportunity to hear from VA leadership concerning key issues within the Department of Veterans Affairs.
7. Arrange for NAC review of, and action on, recommendations.
8. Honor the recipient of the James H. Parke Memorial Youth Scholarship Award.

9. Recognize the NAC Volunteer of the Year recipients.
10. Recognize the recipients of the CDCE American Spirit and Leadership Awards.

Joe Dooley provided review of the EC minutes of October 26-27, 2023. John Kleindienst made a motion to accept the minutes as written. Larry Kelly, Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing, Inc. (PHWFF) seconded the motion, and minutes were accepted as written.

### **Subcommittee Reports:**

Volunteer of the Year: Joe Dooley, Chair, NAC Volunteer of the Year (VOTY) Subcommittee reviewed the subcommittee's report detailing the criteria and nomination process for the VOTY award. This award recognizes individuals providing exceptional service to Veterans through involvement in VAVS assignments as regularly scheduled volunteers. He outlined eligibility criteria, nomination categories, and tips for submitting strong nominations, emphasizing the impact of the nominees' work, and strong letters of support. Additionally, the report highlighted a planned transition from having a male and female VOTY award to a gender-neutral award and introducing one to two additional awards with criteria to be determined. These proposed changes will be worked on by the VOTY subcommittee in preparation for the EC meeting in October 2024.

Recruitment: John Kleindienst, Chair, Recruitment Subcommittee provided an overview of volunteer data and trends within the VA system, focusing on fiscal years 2022-2024. Notably, it highlighted a significant increase in occasional volunteer episodes and hours, while also showing a decrease in the number of regularly scheduled volunteers largely attributed to the pandemic. This figure is beginning to rise as well showing active reintegration efforts across the enterprise. The report also featured data from the Volunteer Transportation Network, or DAV Transportation, a program providing rides to VA appointments and assisting greatly with access to care initiatives. Despite a decrease in the number of volunteer drivers, the program had a rise in the number of rides provided and an increase in total miles driven.

Membership: Mary Morgan, Chair, Membership Subcommittee summarized the subcommittee's report noting their continued focus on engaging current members and recruiting new members. Current members are being contacted more regularly, especially those who have missed recent meetings. The subcommittee is seeking recommendations for new members from a variety of sources, including current VAVS NAC EC members, other VAVS NAC organizations, and Veterans advocate groups while always being mindful of recent attendance of current members. Information about the VAVS NAC and the membership application are available online at <https://www.volunteer.va.gov/NAC.asp>. The report concluded with reference to planned follow-up with the following organizations to determine viability for addition or retention in the same membership category, a change in membership category, or potential removal: Bowlers to Veterans Link, Catholic War Veterans, Korean War Veterans Association, Military Women Across the Nation, National Society Sons of the American

Revolution, Vietnam Veterans of America, and YMCA. A follow-up report on these organizations will be included at the EC meeting in October 2024.

Partnership: Ron Rolfes, Jr. and Karen O'Neal, Co-Chairs, Partnership Subcommittee provided a report highlighting two recommendations the subcommittee has provided the Recommendations Subcommittee. The first proposed recommendation advocates for the inclusion of standards in CDCE Chiefs' performance plans directly correlating to VA goals and VHA priorities. This emphasizes the impact of CDCE programs and their impact on those standards within the Executive Career Field performance plan. The second proposed recommendation focuses on streamlining the approval process for food and beverage requests made using General Post Fund (GPF). It calls for authorizing VA CDCE Chiefs/Program Managers and authorized GPF Approving Officials to approve these requests. This shift aims to empower individuals with subject matter expertise and streamline resource allocation. The rationale behind this proposal is that CDCE personnel, already responsible for managing GPF, are well-equipped to handle these approvals efficiently while adhering to GPF and related policy.

Recommendations: Amy Palmer, Soldiers' Angels, led discussion on the call for recommendations that was routed to all VAVS NAC organizations leading up to the 78<sup>th</sup> Annual VAVS NAC Meeting and Conference. She provided additional context for the two recommendations shared with the Recommendations Subcommittee as presented by the Partnership Subcommittee and endorsed them moving forward to the full VAVS NAC for consideration.

Joe Dooley called for a consent motion to accept all subcommittee reports as presented and EC members unanimously supported the motion.

### **Additional Reports:**

NAC Standard Operation Procedure (SOP): Patricia Kranzow, American Legion Auxiliary, had no suggestions for updates but facilitated discussion on the probable future need to change numbers in the SOP related to how many VAVS Committees an organization must participate on to receive an annual one-year appointment to serve on the EC. Additional numbers noted as needing consideration are those determining service member and associate service member categorization.

James H. Parke Memorial Fund Board of Directors: J.P. Brown, AMVETS, and President, Parke Board commended the job that Ann Glende of the DAV Auxiliary is doing as the newly named Treasurer and summarized the financial status with total portfolio balance of \$1,564,738 and a gain of nearly \$95,600 in the reporting period. He noted his anticipation to celebrate the 2024 James H. Parke Memorial Scholarship recipients and welcomed all to attend. Noted was that the top Parke Scholarship recipient, Zach Gardner who would receive a \$20,000 scholarship from the Veterans Healthcare System of the Ozarks, would be unable to attend the celebration luncheon due to graduation events. However, J.P. Brown noted he was excited to hear an

address from Katrina Campbell who served within VA St. Louis Health Care System's volunteer program. Last, a reminder was provided that the Parke Board can receive donations year-round to support those youth who serve in CDCE volunteer assignments across VA.

VAVS Partners, Inc. Treasurer's Report: Larry Kelly, Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing, Inc., and Treasurer for VAVS Partners, Inc. reported an income of \$4,468.58 and expenses of \$2,745.05, resulting in a net profit of \$1,723.53 for the period ending March 31, 2024. The balance sheet as of March 31, 2024, indicated a total balance of \$55,263.03. Outstanding charges related to the 78th Annual VAVS NAC, including costs for registration materials, printing, food and beverages, an accounting fee, and fraudulent charges that has already been disputed with the bank, totaled \$51,685.50. As of May 10, 2024, the bank account balance was \$73,413.66, which includes the fraudulent charges previously noted. Contributions towards food and beverages for the 78th Annual VAVS NAC amounted to \$2,100.00 to date, with VAVS Partners, Inc. contributing \$1,000.00. Organizations were encouraged to provide support to the non-profit to keep pace with increasing food costs associated with supporting the annual meeting and conference. Last, Joe Dooley thanked Larry Kelly for his tremendous work as the treasurer for VAVS Partners, Inc. as Larry has noted he will be stepping away from VAVS NAC responsibilities following the current conference and meeting.

#### **New Business:**

CDCE Update: Sabrina C. Clark, Ph.D., Director, VA CDCE, VA Central Office (VACO) and Designated Federal Officer thanked EC members for continued support that they provide Veterans and other stakeholders served by VA. Dr. Clark shared experiences from her time as Acting Director, Aleda E. Lutz VA Medical Center, Saginaw, Michigan and noted continual progress is needed towards capturing true impact of the support provided by VAVS NAC member organizations through volunteers, donations, and other strategic partnerships. Last, Dr. Clark encouraged all to take advantage of the many networking opportunities that will be facilitated throughout the 78<sup>th</sup> Annual VAVS NAC Meeting and Conference.

Advisory Committee Management Office Update: Jeffrey Moragne, Director, Advisory Committee Management Office echoed Dr. Clark's appreciation and provided overview of a larger presentation he would deliver to the parent body of the VAVS NAC related to the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). He spoke to the uniqueness of the VAVS NAC as membership is composed of organization representatives, and the charter allows funding of VAVS NAC events and activities during the Committee's meetings.

CDCE Data Review & NAC and EC Membership Requirements: Nathan Witt provided a presentation reviewing data within the CDCE program which built upon the report of the Recruitment Subcommittee. Of note was data supporting the conclusion that reintegration of volunteers has been largely achieved. This is supported by the fact

that 50% of current, active, regularly scheduled volunteers were recruited during or post pandemic; and 20% of the same volunteers were recruited in fiscal year 2023 alone. Discussion was facilitated about recruitment efforts needing to target assignments supporting VA strategic goals and VHA priorities and matching the right volunteers to the most impactful assignments.

ACMO Report Review: Joe Dooley led a discussion in review of the VAVS NAC's most recently submitted Annual Assessment of Activities and Annual Operations Plan. The first report provides a record of activities occurring during the 2023 calendar year, and the second report provides an accounting of planned activities during the 2024 calendar year. Highlights were reviewed and input invited from members for the next report submissions due December 1, 2024.

**Unfinished Business / Q&A / Good of the Order:**

Mitra Gobin-Wade announced that the EC critique of this year's VAVS NAC meeting would be held virtually on a date communicated by email immediately following the 78<sup>th</sup> Annual VAVS NAC Meeting and Conference.

Joe Dooley noted that the next EC meeting is scheduled to occur October 24 - 25, 2024 at the Disabled American Veterans Washington Headquarters located at 1300 I Street NW, Suite 400 West, Washington, DC 20005. He thanked John Kleindienst for preparing to host and encouraged all to stay informed and engaged during the duration of the meeting and conference.

**Adjournment:** Joe Dooley adjourned the meeting at 11:45 a.m.

**Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)  
Center for Development and Civic Engagement (CDCE)  
VA Voluntary Service (VAVS)  
National Advisory Committee (NAC) Business Session  
Wednesday, May 15, 2024 - 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.**

**Call to Order:** Joseph (Joe) Dooley, National Representative, United Veterans Services, and Executive Committee (EC) Chair, called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

**Presentation of Colors:** SGT Charles A. Fricke Post 805, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. located in O’Fallon, Illinois presented the colors.

**Pledge of Allegiance:** Tom Richardson, VAVS Representative, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S., led attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Invocation:** Richard Moore, Chief, Chaplain Service, VA St. Louis Health Care System provided the invocation.

**Welcome:** Marcena C. Gunter, Chief, CDCE, VA St. Louis Health Care System provided welcoming remarks to all on behalf of Candace Ifabiyi, MHA, MSBA, FACHE, Director. Marcena highlighted activities including the Taste of Saint Louis event and Photos Under the Gateway Arch.

**Opening Remarks and Meeting Objectives:** Joe Dooley reviewed the agenda for the meeting and asked participants to review the goals and objectives for the 78<sup>th</sup> Annual NAC Meeting and Conference (see page 2 of the minutes).

**Roll Call:** Mr. Dooley performed the roll call as attendance was recorded by Vicki Sarracino, Soldiers' Angels, and EC Vice Chairperson. 78<sup>th</sup> Annual VAVS NAC attendance was recorded as follows:

	<b><u>Present (P) / Absent (A)</u></b>
<b>Service Member Organizations</b>	
American Gold Star Mothers	P
American Legion, The	P
American Legion Auxiliary	P
American Red Cross	P
AMVETS	P
AMVETS Auxiliary	P
Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks	P
Blinded Veterans Association	P
Blue Star Mothers of America, Inc.	P
Disabled American Veterans	P
Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary	P
Forty and Eight	P

Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A.	P	
Knights of Columbus	P	
Korean War Veterans Association	P	
Marine Corps League	P	
Marine Corps League Auxiliary	P	
Masonic Service Association of North America	P	
Military Order of the Cootie	P	
Military Order of the Cootie Auxiliary	P	
Military Order of the Purple Heart Auxiliary	P	
Military Order of the Purple Heart of the U.S.A., Inc.		A
Military Women Across the Nation		A
National Society Daughters of the American Revolution	P	
National Society Sons of the American Revolution		A
Paralyzed Veterans of America	P	
Polish Legion of American Veterans, U.S.A.	P	
Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing, Inc.	P	
Salvation Army	P	
Soldiers' Angels	P	
Sons of the American Legion	P	
United Daughters of the Confederacy	P	
United Veterans Services	P	
Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary	P	
Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S.	P	
Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc.		A

**Associate Service Member Organizations**

AmeriCorps	P	
Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil War, 1861-1865		A
Fleet Reserve Association	P	
Gold Star Wives of America, Inc.		A
I.B.P.O. Elks of the World, Inc.	P	
Ladies Aux., Polish Legion of American Veterans, U.S.A.		A
National Society United States Daughters of 1812	P	
Women's Army Corps Veterans' Association		A

**Donor Member Organizations**

Bowlers to Veterans Link (BVL), Inc., The		A
Help Heal Veterans	P	
Veterans Voices Writing Project, Inc.	P	

**Strategic Engagement Members**

Student Veterans of America		A
Warrior Rising		A
YMCA of the USA		A



## Honorary Members

Ladies Auxiliary of the Fleet Reserve Association	P	
National Ladies Aux., Jewish War Veterans of the USA, Inc.	P	
Silver Star Families of America, The		A
Sons of AMVETS		A
Women Marines Association	P	

## Subcommittee Reports:

Volunteer of the Year: Joe Dooley, Chair, NAC Volunteer of the Year (VOTY) Subcommittee reviewed the subcommittee's report detailing the criteria and nomination process for the VOTY award. This award recognizes individuals providing exceptional service to Veterans through involvement in VAVS assignments as regularly scheduled volunteers. He outlined eligibility criteria, nomination categories, and tips for submitting strong nominations, emphasizing the impact of the nominees' work, and strong letters of support. Additionally, the report highlighted the planned transition from having a male and female VOTY award to a gender-neutral award and introducing one to two additional awards with criteria to be determined. These proposed changes were also discussed in the previous day's EC meeting, and it was noted criteria would be prepared for review by the EC at their meeting scheduled in October 2024. Joe expressed appreciation to other members of the VOTY subcommittee.

Recruitment: John Kleindienst, Chair, Recruitment Subcommittee provided an overview of volunteer data and trends within the VA system, focusing on fiscal years 2022-2024. Notably, it highlighted a significant increase in occasional volunteer episodes and hours, 51% and 33% respectively between fiscal years 2022 and 2023, while also showing a decrease in the number of regularly scheduled volunteers largely attributed to the pandemic. This figure is beginning to rise as well showing active reintegration efforts across the enterprise. The report also featured data from the Volunteer Transportation Network, or DAV Transportation, a program providing rides to VA appointments and assisting greatly with access to care initiatives. Despite a decrease in the number of volunteer drivers, the program had a rise in the number of rides provided and an increase in total miles driven. John thanked those on the Recruitment subcommittee for stalwart service and invited others in attendance to note interest in serving on subcommittees and workgroups.

Membership: Mary Morgan, Chair, Membership Subcommittee noted their continued focus on engaging current members and recruiting new members. Her appreciation was shared with fellow members of the subcommittee, and she noted new members continue to be sought from a variety of sources including current VAVS NAC organizations and Veterans advocate groups. Information about the VAVS NAC and the membership application are available online at <https://www.volunteer.va.gov/NAC.asp>.

The report concluded with a report on attendance requirements and follow-up occurring with Korean War Veterans Association and Vietnam Veterans of America as

they prepare to move to the Honorary Member category. Additionally, Military Women Across the Nation and National Society Sons of the American Revolution are preparing new membership applications as their attendance places them at risk of removal. Likewise, Bowlers to Veterans Link and YMCA of the USA will receive follow-up as their attendance warrants removal. New membership applications have been requested of them and appropriate follow-up action will occur pending outcome.

Partnership: Ron Rolfes, Jr. and Karen O'Neal, Co-Chairs, Partnership Subcommittee provided a report highlighting two recommendations the subcommittee recently routed to the Recommendations Subcommittee for consideration. Additionally, they reminded attendees that the Partnership Subcommittee prepared a standard operating procedure that is currently hosted on the national CDCE SharePoint which provides guidance supplemental to VHA Directive 1620 as it relates to the VAVS NAC and facility VAVS Committees. Member organizations have received the document by email but can request it again by emailing VHA15CDCEStaff@va.gov. They summarized the two recommendations and deferred the remainder of reporting to Amy Palmer, Chair, Recommendations Subcommittee.

Recommendations: Amy Palmer, Chair, Recommendations Subcommittee summarized the timeline for the most recent call for recommendations which was routed to all VAVS NAC member organizations, and encouraged additional organizations to submit recommendations in the future utilizing the SMART tool distributed. Two recommendations were presented with the first advocating for the inclusion of standards in CDCE Chiefs' performance plans directly correlating to VA goals and VHA priorities. It was noted this would serve to emphasize the impact of CDCE programs for Executive Leadership Team members and various stakeholders. The second recommendation focused on streamlining the approval process for food and beverage requests made utilizing General Post Fund (GPF). It calls for authorizing VA CDCE Chiefs/Program Managers and authorized GPF Approving Officials to approve these requests rather than placing responsibility on GS-15 or Title 38 equivalents. This shift aims to empower individuals with subject matter expertise on use of GPF and streamline resource allocation. The rationale behind this is that CDCE personnel, already responsible for managing GPF, are well-equipped to handle these approvals efficiently and adhere to all relevant guidance. Last, it was noted a call for a vote from service member organizations on these recommendations will occur in the following business session.

NAC Standard Operating Procedure (SOP): Patricia Kranzow, American Legion Auxiliary, reported no immediate action is needed at this time on the VAVS NAC SOP.

**Federal Advisory Committee Act 101:** Jeffrey Moragne, Director, Advisory Committee Management Office (ACMO), Office of the Secretary, provided the mandatory Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) briefing. FACA is law that governs how Federal Advisory Committees (FAC) are created, managed, and ended with the goal of ensuring committees have transparent operations to the public. FACA applies to any group that includes at least one non-federal employee and is used by a government agency to get

advice or recommendations. There are requirements for these committees, including having a formal charter, a designated federal officer, public meetings announced in advance, balanced membership, and accessible records.

The VAVS NAC has a unique charter compared to other VA FACs as the VAVS NAC focuses on supporting VA's mission of caring for Veterans and their families, and its members are representatives from organizations. Additionally, the VAVS NAC's charter allows organizations to fund some of the committee's activities. While FACs can do preparatory or administrative work privately, any meetings that involve providing advice or recommendations must be public. In limited cases, such as when sensitive information is discussed, FAC meetings can be partially or fully closed, but this requires legal approval. Guidelines were shared in the event committee members are asked to testify or speak publicly about FAC matters. Members are allowed to speak about their work on the committee, but only in their personal capacity and making it clear that they are not representing VA or the FAC. They are encouraged to inform the committee's designated federal officer if they plan to testify, and members are prohibited from claiming to speak on behalf of the committee or VA. Last, best practices for VA Federal Advisory Committees were shared which included planning meetings, understanding the committee's charter and guidelines, using subcommittees effectively, collaborating with other committees, leveraging resources like VA Library Services and subject matter experts, conducting field visits, and seeking guidance from the designated federal officer on FACA and ethical matters.

**Video Address from the Secretary of Veterans Affairs:** VAVS NAC members viewed a recorded video address from the Honorable Denis R. McDonough, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. In his address the importance of the FAC was reiterated and Secretary McDonough extended his appreciation to all serving to improve the lives of Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors.

**Office of Patient Advocacy:** Ann E. Doran, Executive Director, VHA Office of Patient Advocacy (OPA) shared the office was established in 2017 by the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act. It plays a crucial role in supporting Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. OPA provides leadership and support to the Patient Advocate community, empowering compassionate service that prioritizes the Veteran's voice. Patient Advocates act as liaisons between Veterans and the hospital, ensuring their concerns are heard and addressed. They work collaboratively with other staff members to resolve problems and may hold various titles, including Patient Representative, Patient Liaison, or Ombudsman. OPA leverages data from the Patient Advocate Tracking System Replacement (PATs-R) to inform Senior Leadership about national trends in Veteran complaints and identify systemic issues for improvement. Key initiatives for fiscal year 2024 include developing Patient Advocacy program outcome measures, re-deploying Service Level Advocacy, and hosting a National Patient Advocate Conference. OPA plays a crucial role in supporting High Reliability as direct feedback is garnered from Veterans on areas requiring improvement, especially concerning safety systems. Committee members were reminded that Patient Advocacy

is everyone's responsibility, including volunteers, as we all must work together for the best outcomes for Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors.

**Whole Health:** Kavitha Reddy, MD, FAAEM, Associate Director Employee Whole Health within the VHA Office of Patient-Centered Care and Cultural Transformation shared that VA is committed to a Whole Health approach that empowers people to take charge of their health and well-being. This model emphasizes self-care, professional care, and community health as integral components of overall well-being. Whole Health aims to decrease reliance on provider-delivered care and increase the utilization of complementary and integrative approaches. The program has shown positive results, including a 23-38% decrease in opioid use among comprehensive Whole Health users. A large-scale study of over 1.3 million Veterans revealed improvements in perceptions of care, engagement in healthcare, self-care, life meaning and purpose, pain, and perceived stress. Data from Fiscal Years 2021-2024 demonstrates increased utilization of Whole Health services within VA, and VA is committed to expanding access to Whole Health services and resources. The National Academy of Medicine has recognized the value and benefits of this approach, highlighting its potential for improving the health and well-being of Veterans. Dr. Reddy concluded with an invitation for VAVS NAC members to seek out Whole Health programming within their local VA medical center and explore volunteer and donor opportunities that can make an impact on those we are privileged to serve.

### **Empowering the Next Generation of Healthcare Professionals Through**

**Volunteerism:** Tammy M. Finney, DNP, MSN, RM, CHCR, Chief, Community Relations and Engagement within the Columbia VA Health Care System and Olala Harris, current undergraduate and volunteer at the Columbia VA Health Care System discussed the importance of engaging young people in healthcare volunteerism to address the projected shortages of healthcare professionals in the coming decade. The Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2021 mandates a pilot program for clinical observation for undergraduate students within VA. The program aims to expose young people to healthcare careers and inspire them to join the VA workforce. Benedict College students participated in the first cohort of the VA Healthcare Talent Academy, demonstrating a strong interest in healthcare careers within VA. Olala Harris, a graduate of the program, highlighted the program's positive impact on career exploration and development. The program provided diverse experiences, mentorship opportunities, and a supportive environment for participants. Harris emphasized the importance of expanding the program nationwide to empower more young people to pursue healthcare careers and contribute to the care of Veterans.

The VAVS NAC recessed at 12:00 p.m. and Joe Dooley provided direction on the various educational workshops, poster sessions, and facilitated networking events available to all attendees with a note that the business session would return from recess the following afternoon at 2:00 p.m.

**Thursday, May 16, 2024 - 2:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.**

**Call to Order:** Mr. Dooley called the meeting back to order at 2:00 p.m.

With review completed of the two recommendations presented by the Recommendations Subcommittee the previous day, a motion was made by John Kleindienst, Disabled American Veterans and seconded by Larry Kelly, Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing, Inc. to forward both recommendations to VA for response. With no further discussion a call was made for a vote of service member organizations and the motion passed.

**2024 CDCE Update:** Sabrina C. Clark, Ph.D., Director, VA Center for Development and Civic Engagement (CDCE) and Designated Federal Officer for the VAVS NAC, presented leadership lessons taken from her time as Acting Medical Center Director at the VA medical center in Saginaw, Michigan. Dr. Clark emphasized the importance of reframing perspectives to foster innovation and growth within CDCE. She highlighted five key areas for reframing: shifting perspectives for innovation, agility and flexibility, organic growth, evolution through retelling, and essentialism. These concepts were visually represented through a series of photographs, and the images served as metaphors for the leadership principles. For example, an image of a hermit crab moving into a new "home" illustrated the concept of being ready to embrace change and adapt to new situations. Similarly, an image of alpacas was used to underscore the importance of expanding networks with intention and recognizing that service is essential. By sharing her experiences and insights through these evocative images and concise messages, Dr. Clark aimed to inspire attendees to approach their work with a fresh perspective, embrace change, and prioritize service in their leadership roles.

**Leadership Panel Discussion:** The panel was moderated by Benita Miller, Deputy Network Director, VA Southeast Network, VISN 7, and featured Dr. Patricia Hall, Network Director, VA Heartland Network, VISN 15; Candace Ifabiyi, Director, VA St. Louis Health Care System; Demitric Franklin, Associate Director, Central California VA Health Care System; and Jeffrey Bernhard, Assistant Director, VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System. Panel members highlighted the crucial role volunteers play in enhancing Veteran care and the importance of incorporating volunteer and community partner feedback to improve operations. Panelists shared anecdotes illustrating the positive impact volunteers have on Veterans' lives, such as providing companionship, assisting with activities, and offering technical support. They emphasized the unique perspective youth volunteers bring, including their energy, tech-savviness, and fresh insights, which can lead to innovative solutions and improvements within VA. The discussion also underscored the value of engaging both traditional and non-traditional Veteran Service Organizations and similar community partners in providing feedback on a range of issues, from facility design to discharge procedures. Panelists acknowledged past instances where neglecting to involve these stakeholders in decision-making processes led to negative outcomes, reinforcing the importance of incorporating their perspectives and expertise. They stressed that VAVS NAC organization feedback is

essential for identifying areas for improvement, ensuring Veteran satisfaction, and fostering a collaborative approach to enhancing the overall quality of care and services provided by VA.

**Veterans Canteen Service:** Renee Claypool, Chief Operating Officer, Veterans Canteen Service (VCS), presented information highlighting the VCS mission, strategic vision, and various initiatives. VCS, established in 1946 operates as a self-sustaining and independent entity within the Veterans Health Administration. Its mission is to provide reasonably priced merchandise and services to enhance the well-being of Veterans, their families, caregivers, VA employees, volunteers, and visitors. She emphasized the VCS's commitment to being an employer of choice by fostering a positive and supportive work environment and highlighted a focus on whole health initiatives. Additionally, she explained the CDCE Promotional Fund, which allows organizations on facility VAVS Committees (or other partnering organizations) to use a percentage of their bulk purchases for VCS items and catering services. She also highlighted opportunities for business-to-business partnerships, including customized apparel and promotional items. The presentation concluded by acknowledging VCS Executive Senior Leaders and showcasing the VCS's commitment to serving Veterans through its involvement in emergency response efforts and community events.

**National Cemetery Service:** Sonny Peppers, Assistant Director, Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery provided an overview of the National Cemetery Administration (NCA), highlighting its history, mission, priorities, and key programs. NCA, established in 1862, is responsible for providing burial and memorial benefits to eligible Veterans, service members, and their families operating 155 national cemeteries across the country and partnering with state, territorial, and tribal governments to provide burial access to Veterans nationwide. The presentation emphasized the NCA's commitment to maintaining national cemeteries as national shrines and expanding burial access to ensure that 95% of Veterans have access to a burial option within 75 miles of their homes. The Veterans Cemetery Grants Program was discussed, which has provided over \$1 billion in grants to support state, tribal, and territory Veteran cemeteries since its inception in 1978. The presentation also highlighted the Veterans Legacy Memorial, a web application that honors Veterans interred in national and VA grant-funded cemeteries, and the Veterans Legacy Program, which engages students and educators in memorializing Veterans through educational outreach.

**Veterans' Family, Caregiver, and Survivor Advisory Committee:** Dr. Betty Moseley Brown, Designated Federal Officer for the Veterans' Family, Caregiver, and Survivor (VFCS) Federal Advisory Committee (FAC) noted its establishment in 2016. It serves to advise the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on matters related to benefits and services for Veterans' families, caregivers, and survivors. The committee is composed of up to 20 members appointed by the Secretary and five subject matter experts from various VA offices. The VFCS FAC, originally under the Veterans Experience Office, transitioned to the Veterans Health Administration under the Caregiver Support Program in May 2023. Dr. Moseley Brown concluded the presentation highlighting the VA Caregiver Support

Line, a resource staffed by clinical social workers who provide information, support, and connections to local Caregiver Support Teams. This resource can be reached at 1-855-260-3274.

**Call to Action:** Michelle Dorsey, M.D., MPH, FACR, FACHE, Deputy Assistant Under Secretary of Health for Operations-Redesign, Veterans Health Administration (VHA), expressed gratitude for the opportunity to attend the 78th Annual VAVS NAC, praising the inspirational work of VA volunteers and community partners. Dorsey emphasized the critical role volunteers play in VA's mission to serve Veterans. She acknowledged the significant contributions of the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) in providing support and satisfaction to Veterans' families. Dr. Dorsey stressed the importance of data integrity and ethical conduct for all VA employees, emphasizing the need for responsible stewardship in service and giving. She encouraged continued innovation in developing programs and activities that engage volunteers and partners in meaningful ways. Recognizing the value of learning and professional development, Dr. Dorsey encouraged attendees to review their notes and utilize the training to enhance their roles within VA, and highlighted the importance of showcasing work through poster sessions as was done during this meeting and conference. Dr. Dorsey concluded by emphasizing the importance of maintaining a focus on the needs of Veterans, evolving VA goals and priorities, embracing youth and student volunteers, and actively seeking feedback for continuous improvement.

**Closing Remarks:** Dr. Sabrina Clark acknowledged the VAVS NAC Planning Committee and provided a special congratulatory message to all award winners who were celebrated during an opening ceremony on May 14, and the James H. Parke Memorial Scholarship Luncheon on May 16. Award winners recognized were:

- National Advisory Committee Male Volunteer of the Year – Christopher Leonardini, Soldiers' Angels, VA Northern California Health Care System
- National Advisory Committee Female Volunteer of the Year – Diane Erickson, American Legion Auxiliary, VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System
- James H. Parke Memorial Youth Scholarship (Top Recipient of a \$20,000 Scholarship) – Zach Gardner, Veterans Healthcare System of the Ozarks
- 2024 VA Center for Development & Civic Engagement American Spirit and Leadership Awards
  - Youth Leadership and Civic Engagement Award – Amy Tomko, VA Butler Healthcare System
  - Community Partnership Award – Todd Greenman, Battle Creek VA Medical Center
  - Innovation Award – Anit Tyagi, VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System
  - Volunteer Supervisor Award – Brenda Barrios, VA Palo Alto Health Care System
  - Strategic Partnership Excellence Award – Southern Arizona VA Health Care System Fisher House

- Executive Leadership Award – Demitric Franklin, VA Central California Health Care System

Joe Dooley added his congratulations to all award recipients, expressed appreciation to all in attendance, and with there being no further business adjourned the meeting at 4:35 p.m.

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Sabrina C. Clark, Ph.D.  
Director, VA Center for Development and Civic Engagement  
Designated Federal Officer, VA Voluntary Service National Advisory Committee