VA Office of Tribal Government Relations

National Indian Health Board Mental Health
August 25, 2022
VA Office of Tribal Government Relations (OTGR)

Established office in January 2011

- In response to President Clinton’s Executive Order 13175 and President Obama’s memorandum on Tribal Consultation dated November 5, 2009
- Recognizes unique Government-to-Government relationship with tribes
- 6 FTEE – Director, Program Analyst, 4 Regional Specialists – hired August/September 2011
- Responsible for managing a portfolio of relationships with tribal governments within a specific region
VA Organization
OFFICE OF TRIBAL GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

Dennis McDonough
Secretary

Donald Remy
Deputy Secretary for VA

Tanya Bradsher
Chief of Staff of VA

Brenda Fulton
Assistant Secretary Office of Public & Intergovernmental Affairs

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Southern Plains / Southeast Region

Peter Vicaire
OTGR Specialist
Central / Northeast Region

Terry Bentley
OTGR Specialist
Western Region

L. HoMana Pawiki
OTGR Specialist
Southwest Region
VA OTGR – 3 MAIN GOALS

Goal 1: Implement VA’s Tribal Consultation Policy

- Top priorities for serving Veterans in Indian Country
- Accreditation of Tribal Veterans Service Offices
- A proposed consolidation of non-VA care into a more standardized system under the Choice Act
- 1ST Consultation occurred 2012 – last as recent as Aug 2021
Goal 2: Facilitate Increased Access to Health Care & Benefits

- Through VA Healthcare Facilities & Vet Centers
- Through Veterans Benefits Administration and National Cemetery Administration
- Through Indian Health Service, Tribal Health Programs and Urban Indian Clinics
  - 74 IHS Agreements at 108 Sites
  - 115 Tribal Health Programs
  - $162.1 Million Reimbursed (FY2012 – to FY2022: Jan 2022)

Goal 3: Promote Economic Sustainability

- Through utilization of GI Bill benefits for education
- Connecting Veterans to job training and job opportunities
- Awareness of federal contract opportunities for Veteran-Owned Small Business
- Expand knowledge and use of the Native American Direct Loan Program for VA home loans on trust lands
Connectibg Tribes to Goals

OTGR Goal 3: **Promote Economic Sustainability**

- OTGR partnered with VBA Benefits Assistance Service in FY18 for a nationwide campaign to Indian Country:
- “*Your Service. Our Mission: Bringing VA Benefits Home.*”

**22 Tribes participated & 30+ Claims Clinic events in Indian Country**

- Kewa Pueblo
- Pascua Yaqui Tribe
- Tohono O'odham Nation
- Pueblo of Pojoaque
- Taos Pueblo
- Copper River Native Assoc. (AK)
- Native Village of White Mtn (AK)
- Tule River Tribe California
- Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians
- Siletz Tribe
- Nooksack Indian Tribe

- Nez Perce Tribe
- Osage Nation
- Seminole Nation of OK
- Shawnee Tribe
- Choctaw Nation of OK
- Kiowa Tribe of OK
- Bay Mills Indian Community
- Navajo Nation
- San Carlos Apache
- White Earth Nation
- Walker River Paiute Tribe
VA Outreach with Tribal Nations

VA Leadership and Tribal Engagements:
- Oct 18-20, 2018, SECVA visit to Alaska Federation of Nation Convention in AK
- Nov 28, 2018, SECVA visit and Tribal Nations Town Hall, Chickasaw Nation, Ada, OK
- July 6, 2019, DEPSEC for Memorial Affairs, NCA, Traveling Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall Commemoration, Pawnee, OK
- Aug 14, 2019, DEPSEC VA visit to the Indian Health Care Resource Center, Tulsa, OK
- Sep 4, 2019, Executive Director, National Center for Women Veterans, Tribal Women Veterans Summit, Oklahoma City, OK
- June 29, 2020, SECVA visit to the Phoenix Indian Health Service Facility, Phoenix, AZ

National Reimbursement Program VHA-I-T-U
- 74 IHS agreements @ 108 IHS sites and 115 THP agreements
- $162,180,658 reimbursed (FY2012 – FY21 Jan) – Unique Vets 14,480

NCA Tribal Veterans Cemetery Grant Program
- Six (6) Tribal Veteran Cemeteries – several more pending

VBA Presumptive Conditions Claims Outreach Events in Tribal Communities
- Collaborated with 24 Tribal governments
- Facilitated 33 claims events
- Estimated 1,100 Veterans and widows were serviced
- Submitted a total of 730 claims for VA benefits

VA Amendment to Title 38 incorporating Tribal Veteran Service Officers
- Accreditation of Tribal Veterans Service Officers
VA Tribal HUD-VASH (VA Supportive Housing) Voucher program

- Program increased Tribal engagement from 23 to 26 Tribes
- Program found 130 AI/AN homes through the Tribal HUD-VASH program
- Key to success: At-Risk of Homelessness providing assistance
- SB 1333 – approved, HUD opened

VA Tribal Veterans Advisory Committee Act of 2019:

- Sen’ Tester (D-MT), Dan Sullivan (R-AK) Tom Udall (D-NM) and Lisa Murkowski ((R-AK)
- Committee will facilitate communication to better address the unique barriers AI/AN Veterans face when accessing services (S.527 and H.R.7105)
- The Act (S:524) established a 15-member committee of reps from each of the 12 IHS regions with 3 At-Large Native American members
- January 29, 2020 – S.524 was approved by SVAC
- October 2021 – VA TAC Committee announced - 1st Meeting Jan 2022

Vet Center FACA (Fed Advisory Committee Act) Board:

- Recently placed two (2) Tribal representatives on the Board

FY 19 Urban Indian Health Programs

- Engagement with Urban Indian Programs
- Find out what scope of services they provide and plan outreach with local Vas
- Amendment to Sec. 113, Sharing Agreements with Federal Agencies, Section 405 of the IHCIA (25 U.S.C.) amended to include Urban Indian Clinics

FY 19 Elders/Seniors Programs

- Identify programs and scope of services they provide
- Goal: work with USET, NICOA, ATNI AFN to reach to a larger scale of programs
VA: New Legislation Specific to Tribal Veterans

H.R. 7105, Johnny Isakson & David P. Roe, Veterans Health & Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (Megabus Act)
- Seven (7) sections within this Act positively affect Tribal Veterans
- As a member of the Committee working on 10 pilot projects across the nation

H.R. 6237, Proper and Reimbursed Care for Native Veterans (or PRC for Native Veterans Act)
- Collaborating and coordinating with IHS, THP, BIA,

H.R. 7105, Native American Veteran Parity in Access to Care (PACT) Act (or Co-pay prohibitions for Native American Veterans (section 3002))
- Currently with Office of General Counsel and Veterans Health Administration Leadership

H.R. 7105, State Veteran Home Grants (Section 3006)
- Oneida Nation currently has contract housing Veterans in their Veterans Home Program

VA Native American Direct Loan (NADL) Program
- Unique in that VA is the Bank

VA Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxic (PACT) ACT
- Expanding healthcare benefits for millions of Veterans exposed to toxic chemicals during their military exposure
Objectives

- Understand the needs of Veterans – which are often silent needs
- Understanding military trauma and healthcare between men and women are so uniquely different
- Summarize collaborative opportunities between VA and your own healthcare systems, to include collaborative working relationships between staff.
Native American Veterans and Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

Suicide data 2017-2018
- Limited data is available regarding suicide rates of AI/AN Veterans
- AI/AN Veterans accounted for 0.7% of Veteran suicides within the VA population
- In 2017, suicide was the 8th leading cause of death for AI/AN of all ages
  - 3,447 deaths in the AI/AN population
  - 18% (640) deaths by suicide
    - 46.6% by suffocation
    - 38.6% by firearm
- Most stigmatized mental health related problems reported by AI/AN communities
  - HIV/AIDS
  - Suicide
  - Mental Illness
  - Sexual assault
Risk Factors and Mitigation for Suicide Native Among Native Americans

Risk Factors

- Substance abuse
- Psychological disorders
- Perceived burdensomeness
- Community stigma
- Historical trauma

Mitigation

- Cultural beliefs
- Hope
- Optimism
- Community and cultural determination
- Ethnic/Tribal Identity
- Participation in culture

Pamela End of Horn, MSW, LCSW, National Suicide Prevention Consultant, Indian Health Service HQ
Tribal Women Veterans

2019 OK Tribal Women’s Summit:
- 16 participating Tribal Nations
- 125 attendees

2021 Tribal Women’ Virtual Summer Series:
- 34 Participating Tribal Nations
- 156 Pre-Registered
- 262 Attended the series

What we learned:
- Will not speak to women health issues/needs with male VSOs
- Do not consider themselves Veterans – so don’t apply
- Feel they are invisible in both Native and Non-Native communities
Native American/Alaska Native Women who served in the Military

- Tribal Women Veterans Summits
  - 2020 – Unable due to pandemic
  - 2022 – Scheduled for Nov 3, 2022, Tulsa, OK –hosted by Muscogee Nation
- Request by AI/AN Women who served in the military
  - Marrying Military to Traditional Culture (based on their own feelings of feeling invisible within their own communities)
  - Intimate Partner Violence-Domestic Violence
  - Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women
  - Transition from the Military to Civilian status back into their communities
  - Moral Injury
  - PTSD and Tribal Workforce – the disconnect these women feel
  - Mental Health Female In-Patient Units – non-existent
  - What we are learning: 1) won’t speak or apply for women’ health needs or disability claims, 2) don’t consider themselves Veterans, and 3) feel invisible in their own communities.
Native American/Alaska Native Women who served in the Military

- 2018 Vet Pop Living Female AI/AN Veterans – VA Statistical Data website
  - 22,314]
- U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey (ACS)
  - Total AI/AN Veteran population:
    - Male: 124,574
    - Female: 15,933
  - AI/AN Veterans comprised 88.7 percent men and 11.3 percent women
    - The portion of female AI/AN Veterans was higher than that of women Veterans of other races (11.3% vs 9.0% respectively)
    - The portion of male AI/AN Veterans was closely equivalent to that of male Veterans of other races (88.7 % vs 91.0 % respectively)
  - In 2017, there were 140,507 AI/AN Veterans (both men and women) of which 65,749 used at least one VA Benefit or service.
Office of Tribal Government Relations Southern Plains and Eastern Region Contact

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www.va.gov/tribalgovernment - Main website

Tribal.agreements@va.gov – VA-IHS-THP Reimbursement Agreements

Tribal.Consultation@va.gov – eMail for tribal leaders to submit inquiries directly to VA