Veteran’s Committee Meeting,

July 14, 2020

In virtual attendance:

Debbie Jones, Samish Indian Tribe

Terry Bentley, VA Office of Tribal Government Relations

Gavin Mayne-Williams, VA Jonathan M. Wainwright Memorial VA Medical Center

Margaux Macchiaverna, VA VISN 20

Melissa Livingston. WA State Health Care Authority

Carrie Epperson, VA Greater Seattle Area

Daniel Delavan, VA Portland Healthcare System

Don Head, *NPAIHB Staff*

The minutes from the January 2020 meeting were read. While getting to the part about contacting the VA personnel who had toured the Tulalip Health Care facility in 2019, Carrie Epperson said she could help Don Head with tracking them down, so he could invite them to the next meeting in October. She emailed her colleagues and cc’d Don during the meeting.

Sarah Sullivan, the NPAIHB Policy Analyst, while not in attendance, requested that Don Head bring up the June 23, 2020 testimony of NIHB Vice Chair Bill Smith (Valdez Tribe, Alaska) before the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, Subcommittee on Health and Subcommittee on Technology Modernization.

The Vice Chair urged the House VA Committee to pass HR 4908 -Native American PACT Act (exemption for Native vets from copays and deductibles in the VA system), and HS 2791 – Dept. of VA Tribal Advisory Committee Act of 2019 (establishes a tribal advisory committee for the VA). The Vice Chair also pressed for parity in COVID-19 funding for Native veterans addressing the following bulleted issues:

* VA has not committed any additional funding towards outreach to AI/AN Veterans to prevent gaps in access to care as VHA facilities reduce services or shutdown in response to COVID-19.
* VA has failed to commit resources to assist AI/AN Veterans with rescheduling cancelled appointments.
* VA Native American Direct Loans for housing have purportedly been put on hold during the pandemic, creating even further barriers for homeless AI/AN Veterans.
* For AI/AN Veterans that have been able to utilize telehealth, many have anecdotally reported frequent connection issues including dropped calls especially in areas with poor broadband access. In areas with many fluent Native language speakers, access to care is further encumbered by lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate virtual care.
* VHA has yet to release any demographic-based breakdowns of use of telehealth-based care delivery making it difficult to learn about any population-specific obstacles in access to virtual health services.

Don Head forwarded Sarah Sullivan’s email to those present, so that they could have the links to the press release and the legislation. The committee had no recommendations on further advocacy from the committee on this legislation.

Terry Bentley indicated that her office was conducting more virtual outreach, and that in August, they were starting WebEx Wednesdays, to address topics like health care information, resources to Indian Country, Suicide Prevention, PTSD etc. These webinars will involve all three branches of the VA, Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration, and National Cemetery Administration.

Terry also said that the Office of Community Care will be seeking tribal consultation with respect to care coordination between IHS and VA. The date set for that will be August 20, and the Dear Tribal Leader Letter is about to go out. This consultation will help disseminate the VA’s plans to enhance care coordination between tribal health care programs and the VA.

Finally, Terry Indicated that there was a job opportunity in Washington DC for a female veteran with at least 30% service-connected disability.

Meeting was adjourned.