

The National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission is comprised of four committees.

1. Health Administration Committee
2. National Cemetery Committee
3. Veterans Benefits Committee
4. TBI/PTSD/Suicide Prevention Committee

All VA&R Commission and Committee meeting slide presentations will be on the American Legion website after the convention!

TBI/PTSD/Suicide Prevention Committee (8/25/23)

1) **Breakthrough Therapies for Veteran Suicide Prevention**

Doc Lynette Averill and Marine Veteran Ray Brooks from Reason for Hope gave a comprehensive presentation on why we should have a national policy focused on developing the infrastructure for safe, affordable, and equitable access to psychedelic-assisted therapy for mental health conditions. Reason for Hope, led by retired Lieutenant General Martin Steele, works towards drafting legislation, preparing legal briefings and policy proposals, testifying in hearings, educating legislators and government officials, and building broad advocacy coalitions. They are focused on establishing MDMA- and psilocybin-assisted therapy expanded access pilot programs for those who cannot afford to wait for FDA approval.

reason-for-hope.org.

2) **Operation Brainstorm – Initiative for Veterans and Active-Duty Military**

Ms. Susan Stone and Dr. Timothy Smith from the National Headache Foundation introduced Operation Brainstorm, which the National Headache Foundation established as a health resource initiative for the military community: veterans, active-duty, military families, and loved ones living with migraine disease and headache disorders.

Operation Brainstorm is developing a robust online educational, awareness, and navigation care hub to house tools and resources customized for and with the military community. The six Veterans Services Organizations will be an integral part of Operation Brainstorm. Targeted city post commanders will be identified to support listening tours, educational forums, and panel discussions, bringing veterans together to learn about migraine disease and headache disorders. Healthcare professionals within the VA system will receive CME programs, tools, and resources to optimize patient care. headaches.org/operationbrainstorm

National VA&R Commission Meeting (8/26/23)

1) Veterans Benefits Administration – Update

Mike Frueh, Assistant Under Secretary for Benefits, Department of Veteran Affairs, reported the following:

- \$180 billion in veteran benefits was distributed this last year, and the amount keeps growing because “there is a lot more need, a lot more outreach, a lot more veterans taking advantage of the benefits they’ve earned.”
- The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) now has close to 31,000 employees after aggressive hiring this last year.
- Irene Triplet, a veterans beneficiary tied to the Civil War, received VA benefits until her passing on May 31, 2020.
- Twenty-three spouses from the Spanish-American War are still receiving benefits.
- The VA announced The Agency Equity Team, known as the IDEA (inclusion, diversity, equity, and access) Council, will be responsible for helping the VA improve outcomes for historically underserved Veterans, identifying and eliminating any disparities in VA health care and benefits, creating, and implementing a VA Equity Action Plan, listening to and learning from historically underserved Veteran communities, and more.
- Acknowledge the 1st Anniversary of the Pact Act that produced 23 new presumptives with 300 disabilities.

2) National Cemetery Administration (NCA)– Update

Matthew Quinn, Major General, USA Ret, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs National Cemetery Administration

- The NCA’s goal is that 95% of veterans will have a national or grant-funded State Tribal territorial cemetery within 75 miles of their home. Okay. Today, NCA is at 94% of achieving that goal.
- Pre-Need Eligibility. You can apply to find out in advance if you can be buried in a VA national cemetery. This is called a pre-need determination of eligibility—and it can help make the burial planning process easier for your family members in their time of need. For more information on how to apply for your burial in advance, go to <http://cem.va.gov/cem/pre-need/index.asp> or call (800) 535-1117 and press option 4
- The NCA Veterans Legacy Memorial (VLM) is an online memorial that honors more than 4.8 million Veterans in VA National Cemeteries, VA grant-funded tribal, state, and territory Veteran Cemeteries; DoD-managed cemeteries (including Arlington), and two U.S. Park Service National Cemeteries. To learn more or to honor your veterans, go to va.gov/remember.

3) Veteran Health Administration – Update

Shereef Elnahal, MD, Under Secretary for Health, Department of Veteran Affairs

- PACT Act special health care enrollment period ends 9/30/23.
 - Visit va.gov/PACT.
 - If you served in a theater of combat operations during a period of war after the Persian Gulf War - OR - served in combat against forces after November 11, 1998 - AND - were discharged or released between 9/11/2001 and 10/01/2013.
 - It’s free, no annual costs and your health care may also be free.

- Support Veterans Whole Health: Addressing Health Disparities. The priority of Action Goal is to identify two quality health outcomes for two underserved Veteran groups for intervention.
 - Underutilization of statin medication (pilots in Little Rock, San Diego, Kansas City, Baltimore, and Richmond)
 - Underutilization of diabetes medication (pilots in Pittsburg, Salem, Palo Alto, Dayton, and Minneapolis)
- Priority to Action Goal: To screen 1,000 Veterans for social determinants of health using screening tools including but not limited to Assessing Circumstances and Offering Resources for Needs (ACORN), including women and historically underserved Veterans.

4) Oracle Cerner: Improving Veteran Care through a Common Health Record

Pat Sargent, Oracle Health Federal

- Discussed continued challenges with the Oracle Cerner [electronic health record](#) (EHR) system deployed at hospitals operated by the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- The Oracle Cerner EHR system is a key platform doctors use to access the medical records of current and former military personnel. It is being rolled out at the VA to replace the open-source Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture (VISTA) health information system.
- Oracle Cerner has successfully deployed its EHR to every DoD military treatment facility in the United States. They will begin deploying that system to Europe and the Pacific in October and September 2023. They have fully deployed within the Coast Guard NOAA and created the first-of-its-kind federal healthcare systems.
- The goal is that we will soon have continuity of care, a continuum of care, and seamless interoperability of care, which will be enhanced by having the record that transitions from DOD, the VA, and the local community.

5) Office of Mental Health & Suicide Prevention: Underserved Communities

Ilse Wiechers, MD, Deputy Executive Director, Veterans Health Administration. Doc Wieches' main points were:

- A survey, taken in September 2022, of Veterans who engaged in **mental health** care reported high satisfaction with VA mental care.
 - 84% said VA mental health services overall are helpful to very helpful, compared to 71% for non-VA mental health services.
 - 4 out of 5 Veterans said VA virtual care via telephone and video is as helpful or more helpful than in-person visits.
 - Around 90% said mental health providers listened carefully, showed respect, and explained things in a way that was easy to understand.
- VA is committed to **Veteran Whole Health**, an approach to healthcare that empowers and equips Veterans to take charge of their health and well-being and live their lives to the fullest.
 - Emphasizes a holistic, proactive, patient-focused approach to healthcare, including prevention and treatment.
 - Includes conventional and complementary approaches.
 - Takes the person's community (social & structural determinants of health) into consideration.

- For more information, va.gov/wholehealth
- **Telemental Health Services**
 - In FY22, nearly 1 million Veterans received almost 5.9 million video TMH visits, a 13.7 increase in Veterans and a 4% increase in visits over FY21.
 - In FY22, approximately 40% of total MH care has been in person, while 34% of total MH care has been via video.
 - Telehealth is not just a secondary strategy but is becoming a universal, primary consideration for Veterans seeking MH care.
 - For more information, go to telehealth.va.gov
- **National Buddy Check Week** is October 16-20, 2023

6) **Non-VA Accredited Claim Sharks Prey on Disabled Veterans Filing Initial VA Claims**

This presentation was from Paul Sullivan, the Director of Veteran Outreach at Bergmann & Moore, LLC. The firm was founded in 2004 by former VA employees and has provided The American Legion service officer training and legal consultation since 2017. In 2022, Bergmann & Moore entered into a memorandum of understanding with the American Legion to help Legionnaires understand the Camp Lejeune Justice Act (CCLJA), which allows certain veterans to collect damages from the federal government due to their exposure to contaminated water on that Marine Corps Base. The main message from this brief was:

- 1) VA accreditation is required to assist veterans in filing claims 38 CFR 14.629 (b)(1)
- 2) VA accreditation is required to charge veterans a fee 38 CFR 14.636 (b)
- 3) A person must be approved by VA's Office of the General Counsel (OGC)
- 4) Accredited individuals agree to follow VA's Standards of Conduct.
- 5) To confirm the VA accredits a person, go to OGC's Accreditation Search website.
 - a. <https://www.va.gov/ogc/apps/accreditation/index.asp>

VA&R Convention Committee (8/27/23)

A meeting of the VA&R Convention Committee meets at 0900 on 8/27/2023 to consider 11 VA&R-related resolutions. The Committee was not provided copies of the resolutions or fact sheets. Instead, the resolved clauses were shown on a screen. There was discussion that moving forward, committee members should be provided the full resolution before being asked to make recommendations.

The attached document shows the assigned resolution number, Origin, Title, and recommended action from the VA&R Convention Committee.

California's Resolution, **BeTheOne & TruConnect**, did not reach the National Adjutant and Librarian in time for the Convention; it will be presented to the NEC in October 2023. To view the resolution and fact sheets, go to <https://bit.ly/BeTheOneTruConnect>

Chris Yates
National VA&R Commission

Resolution	From	Title	Recommendation
4	New York	Oversight of Medical Disability Examination Office Contract Providers	Referred for further study
5	Minnesota	Investigation of Anthrax vaccinations	Referred to Standing Committee
6	New York	Department of Veteran Affairs S.A.V.E. training at Posts	Referred for further study
7	New York	Medicare & Federal portion of Medicare applied to cost of care	Rejected
8	New York	Software Training and Oversight in Department of Veterans Affairs	Referred for further study
9	Florida	Change Post Service Officer title to Post Resource Officer	Referred for further study
10	Florida	Review of all claims affected by inaccurate contact information	Referred for further study
3	South Dakota	Amend Rating Requirements for Hypertention	Approved as amended
5	New York	Reevaluation of the Rating process of Hyertention	Consolidated with resolution 3 from South Dakota
4	South Dakota	Amend elegibilty for Burial Headstone and Markers	Approved
7	Texas	Internment of war and service dogs in National Cemeteries	Referred to Standing Committee