

Minutes from #3 of AZ Veterans' Advisory Commission Strategic Policy Update Meeting from Oct. 25, 2023; minutes updated 2 Nov 2023; by Kathy Gallowitz; Committee: Kathy Gallowitz, Phil Cushman, Chuck Byers; Director Allmond attended 25 Oct 2023

Overall Priorities:

- Decrease Veteran suicide through improved education, collaboration and coordination of services.
- Increase affordable housing and decrease homelessness.
- Improve access to healthcare for rural Veterans.
- Elevate the property tax and income threshold for state tax exemptions.
- Educate employers on Veteran-hiring/retention best practices, draw Veterans and military spouses to AZ and develop the AZ Employer Council with a majority of employers to decrease Veteran unemployment and underemployment.
- Expand Veteran Treatment Courts and other support of justice-involved Veterans.
- Increase the number of Veterans that become teachers and healthcare providers.
- Use Medicare credentialing reciprocity for TRICARE providers.
- Understand and monitor the impact of immigration policies and water shortages on Veterans.
- Expand engagement of the civilian faith community in support of Veterans.
- Assess whether the long term care needs of Veterans are being met, the financial well-being of Veterans and prevalence of Veteran heat-related deaths.

Questions to answer:

Director Allmond will attempt to obtain answers from relevant agencies.

Policy objectives will be modified if needed once responses are received.

- What are the demographics of Arizona's Veteran community, i.e. age, gender, ethnicity, where they live and rank.
- What are the current suicide rates for Arizona Veterans and how do they compare with other states?
- How does the homelessness of Arizona's Veterans compare to Arizona civilians and to other states?
- What are the unemployment and underemployment rates of Arizona Veterans? How do these compare with other states?
- What are the barriers for Arizona Veterans obtaining good paying jobs in Arizona?
- What are the causes of Veteran underemployment in Arizona?
- How can we assess the financial well-being of Arizona Veterans?
- How many civilian faith communities have specific Veteran-community support initiatives in place?
- Are the long term care needs of Arizona's Veterans being met?
- How do the baccalaureate graduation rates of student Veterans compare to non-Veterans in Arizona and to other states?
- How many Veterans have been deported and why?
- How many Veterans died by heat-related deaths in 2023 and where did these occur? How does this compare to previous years?

Arizona Veterans Advisory Commission 2023 Updated Strategic Policy Objectives

I. Promote sustainable employment, talent development and the economic security of Arizona's Veterans.

- Educate employers on Veteran-hiring best practices (P)
- Attract Veterans/Military Spouses to Arizona's workforce (P)
- Draw Native Americans back to Arizona after their military service (P)
- Develop the State Veteran Employment Council with employers as a majority (P)
- Create hiring preferences for able/disabled Veterans in state and local government jobs (P)
- Establish 3% state contract set-asides for Veteran Owned Businesses (P)
- Incentivize small business and local governments to hire Veterans (P)
- Expedite military medics into civilian healthcare jobs (P)
- Add funding to Troops to Teachers so that more Veterans can become teachers (P)
- Elevate property tax and income threshold for state tax exemptions (P)
- Make twenty tribal/rural Veteran Benefit Counselor's (VBC) a budget line item (P)
- Monitor and promote the overall effectiveness (#claims, approval rating) of Veteran Benefit Counselors, in particular those in rural and tribal areas (A)
- Examine and monitor Veterans' transportation challenges i.e. for medical appointments, work, school, etc (A)
- Assess the financial well-being of Arizona's Veterans and identify ways to positively influence (A)
- Support Arizona Coalition for Military Family's:
 - *Arizona Veteran Supportive Employers (AVSE)*
 - DOD Skillbridge
 - "AZHires Vets," to employ more Veterans in state government jobs

II. Improve Veterans' access to mental, physical, spiritual and legal support.

- Broadly support suicide prevention strategies, to include:
 - Support funding of Arizona Coalition of Military Family's *Be Connected Support Line, Resources and Navigator Training* (P)
 - Firearm safety in Veterans' homes (A)
 - DVS' initiatives:
 - Suicide prevention training pilot program to educate VSO leaders and VBC's (A)
 - Stakeholder outreach to facilitate Veterans receiving a warm handoff to civilian life (A)
 - Outreach to Veterans to foster awareness about direct services and benefits (A)
 - Training VBCs to specialize in rural area populations (A)
 - Identification of high-risk Veteran populations.
- Advocate for adding "Ask a Veteran: Have you or family served in the Armed Forces?" to all state agency forms (A)
- Expand tele-health and tele-medicine into rural communities, including extending broadband and fostering digital literacy (A)
- Fund *Star Behavioral Health* to educate civilian behavior health providers about military culture and learn evidence-based interventions (P)
- Monitor and evaluate Veteran heat-related deaths and influence positive outcomes (A & P)
- Monitor, evaluate and influence expansion of Veteran-specific spiritual support within the civilian faith communities (A)
- Support the needs of aging Veterans in these ways:
 - Obtain current aging demographics of Veterans (A)
 - Assess whether the long term care needs of Veterans are being met (A)
 - Protect and grow the cemetery trust fund with the intent to build more Veteran cemeteries across the state (P)
 - Provide memorial grants for private and municipal cemeteries (P)

- Provide better communication and coordination of benefits for Veterans' widows (A and P)
- Foster collaboration of Arizona HealthCare Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) and Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) to better support Veterans aging in rural communities (A)
- Understand and potentially streamline eligibility requirements for residents and enable staffing of Arizona's Veterans Nursing homes (A)
- Support development of more Veterans Treatment Courts:
 - Increase funding (P)
 - Share best practices (A)
 - Promote DVS':
 - Development of a "Justice Involved" Veterans tool kit (A)
 - Full utilization of the staff Housing Coordinator (A)
- Support organizations that provide legal assistance to Veterans (A)
- Keep needs of Veteran subgroups top of mind - Minority, Women, Disabled, Rural, Native American: (A)
 - Support DVS' engagement with Native Americans:
 - Create rural and tribal engagement events using satellite internet capabilities
 - Deploy tribal traditional healing program
 - Monitor the impact of water shortages
- Advocate for these federal issues:
 - Provide Veterans paid transportation to healthcare appointments, especially for rural Veterans (A)
 - Use Medicare credentialing reciprocity for TRICARE providers (P)
 - *Fisher Homes* in Phoenix, Prescott and Tucson (A)

III. Ensure Access to Affordable Housing

- Expand affordable housing options for Veterans (P)
- Ensure Veterans have access to HUD-VASH vouchers (A)

- Monitor and promote financial stability for military families (A)
- Support these efforts:
 - Arizona Veteran Homeless Action Plan (A)
 - DVS Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program (A)

IV. Improve educational outcomes for Veterans and their families:

- Monitor Veterans' postsecondary graduation rates and barriers for successful completion (A)
- Fund Purple Star Schools to foster awareness about the needs of and support for military children K-12 (P)

V. Monitor, evaluate and influence how these Governor priorities affect Veterans:

- Water shortages
- Immigration policies

Legend:

(A) Administrative response

(P) Policy issue - may require legislation