

**Arizona Department of Veterans' Service Advisory Commission**  
4141 North S. Herrera Way, Phoenix, AZ 85012

**May 14, 2015**

**MINUTES**

**Advisory Commissioners Present**

Ron Perkins  
Brett Rustand  
Andrew Griffin  
Phillip Hanson  
John Scott  
Jeffrey Olson  
David Tolliver

**Advisory Commissioners Present**

Kara Caldwell

**AZ Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS)**

Judy Smith, Administrative Secretary

**Invited Guests**

Sergio Chao, Assistant Director, VA Regional Office  
Steve Aquino, Legal Admin. Specialist, VA National Call Center  
Sue Sisley, M.D.

**Call to Order** – Chairman Ron Perkins called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

**Approval of Meeting Minutes** – Chairman Perkins called for the approval of the March 12, 2015 Veterans Advisory Commission Meeting Minutes. There being no changes to the minutes Commissioner Hanson moved to approve the minutes as written. Commissioner Hanson seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

**Introduction and Welcome of Invited Guests** – Chairman Perkins acknowledged guests.

**Sergio Chau, Assistant Director, VA Regional Office**

Chairman Perkins welcomed VA Regional Office Assistant Director, Sergio Chao. Mr. Chao came to the VA Regional Office in December, 2010.

*(Please refer to Mr. Chau's presentation, located [here](#).)*

Mr. Chao gave an overview of the current pending claim backlog and stated that the average claim is approximately 194 days to process, a huge decrease from the previous year. Additionally, the claims workload is becoming nationalized allowing locations that have the capacity to help process claims received in other states.

Mr. Chao, along with Mr. Steve Aquino, Legal Administrative Specialist for the VA National Call Center, explained the EBenefits program. A veteran can apply for benefits, update direct deposit information, change their address, apply for a certificate of disability for loans, check the status of a claim or appeal and print out VA letters.

Mr. Aquino responded to a question regarding address changes and stated this can be done through EBenefits, however it will not update an addresses within the healthcare system. The change has to be made directly with the VHA "MyVA" website or directly with the VA Hospital.

Mr. Chao further explained that the VA Secretary Robert McDonald implemented the "MyVA" program that is one centralized location where all personal information is contained and the VA is currently moving towards implementation.

Mr. Chao updated the commission on the process for claims received via U.S. Mail. Currently these claims are sent to a vendor who scans all claims into the VA records system (BBMS) and employees work the claims through an electronic format. The VA is moving to an optical character recognition (OCR) system that will save time processing. Out of state claims received can then be electronically reassigned to the appropriate regional office.

The Commissioners discussed the need for the claims process to be more expedient and Mr. Chao stated that by the end of 2015 the goal of the VA is to not have any claims pending over 125 days.

### **Sue Sisley, M.D. - remarks and Power Point presentation**

Dr. Sisley is in private practice for internal medicine and psychiatry and has been trying to get her "Safety & Efficacy of Medical Marijuana for Veterans with Treatment-Resistant PTSD" study underway for five years. (*Dr. Sisley's presentation is located [here](#).*) Dr. Sisley has asked to be on the agenda to present her research on the effects of medical cannabis in the treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and to ask the Commission for their assistance in encouraging the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to allow her to present this information to staff at the Phoenix VA facility during their "grand rounds".

The Commissioners discussed her request and decided to pen a letter to the governor and the agency director urging them to encourage the USDVA to allow Dr. Sisley to make a presentation.

### **Outreach Activities for the Commission**

Commissioner Scott represented the Advisory Commission at the Veterans Roadmap to Employment Success event hosted by the Arizona Coalition for Military Families and met ADVS Director Wanda Wright at the event. He also attended the grand opening of the Scottsdale CBOC on May 7.

Commissioner Scott stated the 25 Cities Initiative to End Veterans' Homelessness has a goal by August to end all veteran homelessness statewide. The last 80 homeless veterans that we absolutely know of through Point In Time counting and stand down data have been identified and U.S. Veterans Initiative is anticipating a great announcement.

Commissioner Olson has attended veterans benefit center meetings around the nation. There have been many questions/discussions concerning the Choice Card.

Commissioner Perkins participated in the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) "Storming the Hill" in Washington, D.C. They met with Senators McCain and Flake and several representatives, their chiefs of staff, or legislative officers. MOAA is pushing for veteran's issues such as pay raises, Tricare Health Care issues and the retirement program

Chairman Perkins and Commissioner Rustand attended the Fisher House groundbreaking ceremony Thursday, May 7, at the Southern Arizona VA Hospital. Commissioner Rustand gave a presentation.

Chairman Perkins will be in Green Valley next week to attend the State Council Meeting.

### **Open Discussion for the Good of the Order**

Commissioner Griffin offered to host the July meeting at Northern Arizona University (NAU) in Flagstaff and the Commissioners agreed.

Chairman Perkins asked Commissioner Griffin to try and get speakers from the area or the Navajo Nation. The Chairman would also like someone who can give an update on the proposed Chinle Veteran Home and how that project is progressing.

Chairman Perkins noted that Commissioner Caldwell gave birth to a daughter last week. He further

stated that she will be resigning from the commission as her husband has accepted a position in Virginia.

Commissioner Olson is completing his six year term with the commission on July 1.

The meeting adjourned at 12:04 p.m. The next Advisory Commission meeting will be held July 9, 2015 at NAU, Flagstaff, Arizona.



# Phoenix VA Regional Office

Sergio Chao, Assistant Director

3333 N. Central Avenue  
Phoenix, Arizona

# Phoenix VA Regional Office

May 14, 2015

**FTE Authorized = 508**

**On-Board = 487**

**65% Veterans**



# Phoenix VA Regional Office

May 14, 2015

Veterans Service Center (283 employees)

National Call Center (100 employees)

Regional Loan Center (68 employees)

Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment  
(32 employees)



# Phoenix VA Regional Office

May 14, 2015

## Workload As of May 1, 2015

Inventory = 9,635

Backlog (> 125 days) = 3,862 (40%)

Over 1 year = 421

Over 2 year = 4

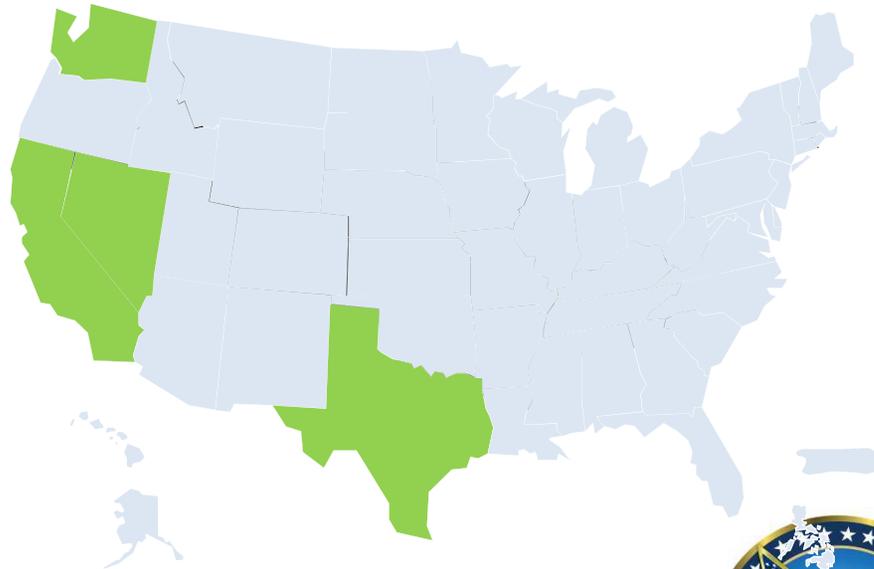


# Phoenix VA Regional Office

May 14, 2015

Brokered in over 4,500 claims

- Oakland
- Reno
- Seattle
- Houston



# Phoenix VA Regional Office

May 14, 2015

## Timeliness as of May 1, 2015

Phoenix Average Days Pending = 139.1 days

Phoenix Average Days Completed = 194.5 days



# eBenefits

Provides resources and self-service capabilities to Veterans, Service members, and their families.

- Apply for benefits
- Update Direct Deposit
- Change of Address
- Obtain Certificate of Eligibility
- Check status of a claim and/or appeal
- Print out VA letters

VA/DOD electronic web portal – [www.eBenefits.va.gov](http://www.eBenefits.va.gov)



# eBenefits

Ability to research, access and manage VA and military benefits and personal information.

- Level 1 (Basic)
- Level 2 (DS Logon)

VA/DOD electronic web portal – [www.eBenefits.va.gov](http://www.eBenefits.va.gov)



# eBenefits

Percent of claims received electronically through eBenefits = 99.1%

Number of claims submitted electronically through eBenefits  
FYTD = 1,457 – 13.3% of our receipts



# Phoenix VA Regional Office

May 14, 2015

## Centralized Mail Portal

Compensation and Pension related mail criteria:

- Mail received from the United States Postal Service mail delivery
- Mail personally delivered to the Regional Office (RO) by Veterans
- Mail received through facsimile or electronic mail that is either submitted to the RO or sent directly to the vendors physical location



# Phoenix VA Regional Office

May 14, 2015

## Centralized Mail Portal

The RO uses the CM Portal to conduct the following:

- Monitor receipts
- Assign work to employees
- Review employee work
- Re-assign misrouted mail to the appropriate jurisdiction

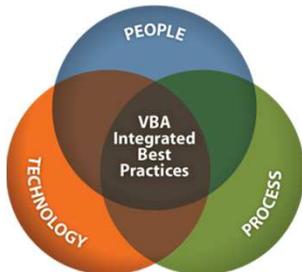


# Phoenix VA Regional Office

May 14, 2015

## Centralized Mail Portal Continued

eBenefits – Documents uploaded through eBenefits are automatically uploaded to the CM Portal.





Questions