

## **BVS POC REPORT**

### **BEHAVIORAL HEALTH & REHABILITATIVE SERVICES**

1. **Date of Report:** 17 August 2020
2. **BVS POC(s):** Senator Mamie Locke and Carl Bess
3. **Service Area/Program:** Behavioral Health & Rehabilitative Services
4. **VDVS Director/Program Manager:** Leanna Craig
5. **Mission of service area/program:**

The Virginia Veteran and Family Support Program (VVFS) is operated by the Virginia Department of Veterans Services and provides OUTREACH, CONNECTION and SUPPORT to veterans and their families as they address the challenges of military service, transition, deployments, Post Traumatic Stress, and other behavioral health concerns, as well as Traumatic Brain Injuries and other physical injuries.

**SERVICES THEY PROVIDE:** Referral and connection services are coordinated with Community Services Boards, brain injury service providers, VA medical facilities and other public and private agencies. Additionally, VVFS provides direct support via personalized care coordination, peer-to-peer mentoring, caregiver skill building and support groups.

6. **Who does the service area/program serve?**

Veterans of any era (regardless of discharge status) who are Virginia residents; members of the Virginia National Guard and Armed Forces Reserves not in active federal service; and family members and caregivers of those veterans and service members. They work hard to provide a "no wrong door approach", meaning if they can't provide that service within the program, they'll do their best to connect them to a resource/provider that can.

7. **How is the service/program delivered?**

Service is delivered throughout the state and is divided into four regions, with programming such as Mission: Healthy Families, Mission: Healthy Relationships, Veteran Peer Services, Justice Involved services and Resource Specialists that provide comprehensive assessments of the Service Member, Veteran and Family (SMVF) need. They also do behavior health suicide screening within this framework. From there, depending on the needs assessed and identified, they provide internal services (peer groups, care coordination, resource connection) as well as hands-on connections with the VA's Community Services Boards, private providers, and many others for behavioral health and rehabilitative needs.

**8. How does delivering the service/program help Virginia's veterans?**

Delivering these services assists Virginia's veterans by providing resources, services and benefits they may be connected to and did not know they could benefit from. It also assists by bridging barriers and gaps in services and providing a smooth avenue around many federal, state and local systems.

**9. By helping the veteran, how does it help the Commonwealth?**

By helping the veteran, it helps the Commonwealth by continuing to ensure Virginia is a veteran friendly state and provides comprehensive and wrap-around services for those residing in Virginia.

**10. What is the statutory authority for the service area/program?**

Virginia Veteran and Family Support (VVFS) is a legislatively mandated program operated by the Virginia Department of Veterans Services, which is overseen by the Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs. The VVFS operates in cooperation with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services and the Department of Rehabilitative Services. It was established in 2008 in response to the growing need to improve and expand services to the nation's veterans and their family members whose lives have been touched by stress-related injuries or traumatic brain injury. Formerly known as the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program, it was re-branded to the Virginia Veteran and Family Support on October 1, 2015.

**11. Where do the resources for the service area/program come from?**

The Virginia Veterans Services Foundation is an independent agency of the Commonwealth of Virginia, supporting the interests of veterans and their families through the Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs and is governed by an appointed Board of Trustees. The Virginia Veterans Services Foundation provides *supplemental funding* when state and federal resources are not available.

**12. How has COVID-19 impacted the delivery of services? What service adaptations have been made or are planned?**

COVID-19 initially impacted service delivery by going from a full office and community presence to a 100% virtual model; however, the VVFS was able to transition to this posture without stopping services. They have worked very hard since then with several committees and strategy planning to assist veterans "where they are" which is an important aspect of the services they provide. They have adapted to a more virtual environment where possible, utilized the VA and community partners for resource collaboration during COVID-19, and have transitioned back to a hybrid model where they can see veterans in offices when needed as well as extenuating circumstances with proper protocol and policies in place.

What is especially noteworthy is that they have been extremely successful in training

Community Service Board (CSB) staff and other providers in Military Cultural Competency (MCC) in the virtual environment and have trained 1,120 individuals since March 2020 as part of the Governor's Challenge for Suicide Prevention for Service Members, Veterans, and Family Members (SMVF). This training helps other providers be "force extenders" in connecting veterans to behavioral health and other needed services.

**13. What are the biggest challenges facing the service area/program at present?**

Continuing to adapt to the COVID-19 situation, the inability to continue community partnerships in a face-to-face setting, while they are making "virtual" work, there is an adaptability piece for this. Some veterans are not comfortable with the virtual environment and some touchpoints are harder to make when they aren't in the community and collaborating with partners on a more frequent basis.

**14. What strategic opportunities are there for the future?**

The continuance of strategic planning around a virtual environment, growing the resource pool for those providing services for behavioral health/rehabilitative services, and continuously receiving partner updates on these for cross-systems referrals. Continually and strategically planning ways to reach those in the community that might not reach out to them first.

**15. What else do you want the Board to know about this service area?**

Often the work in VVFS with regard to behavioral health and rehabilitative services can be complex. They are a touchpoint and ongoing support for the veteran in a very complex world of multiple resources at the federal, state and local level. It's hard to capture all they do, or what it might take to see successful outcomes, as they try to bridge any gap and barrier to services and work endlessly to ensure connection needs are met. They greatly appreciate the support of the Commonwealth and Leadership for the continuous belief in the program. Additionally, they would appreciate any opportunity to present at future meetings and look forward to bolstering their partnership with the BVS.

Prepared by:

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