

To NACHC's Veterans Interest Group (VIG),

Thank you for your continued interest in and dedication to serving Veterans in your communities during these continued trying times! This is how our November 2020 VIG update opened and the sentiment still holds true today. Since the November update, our operating environment has been impacted by local, state and national elections, the Presidential transition, the storming of the U.S. Capitol and continued, tragic examples of health inequities during a pandemic that now extends beyond 12 months, with vaccination efforts fully underway!

During all that is happened, we remain aware of how Veterans are involved or impacted. We also continue to see how the Nation's health centers are part of the solution for Veterans' health care access, pandemic notwithstanding! The NACHC team is amazed, but not surprised, by the work you are doing in your communities. We appreciate your continued commitment to do all you can to support Veterans. Please be assured we regularly highlight the work you do for Veterans and with Veterans Service Organizations locally and statewide.

We usually gather as a Veterans Interest Group during the NACHC's Policy and Issues Forum (P&I) in Washington, DC. The P&I is occurring all-virtually this week, and so in lieu of our in-person meeting, here are several updates:

Leadership Changes at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA): On February 8, 2021, the U.S. Senate confirmed (by a vote of 87-7) Denis McDonough as the new Secretary of the VA. Many of the career VA employees with whom we have worked on community care programs, services to rural Veterans and innovative service arrangements have remained in their positions and maintained communication with us.

Legislation: Equally important is the work on Capitol Hill that impacts health center's ability to serve Veterans. As you are aware, the recently enacted American Rescue Plan includes significant resources and opportunities for health centers. In addition, this legislation also included up to \$4B for the provision of community-based services to Veterans. The inclusion of these funds is a strong signal that the Congress still supports the notion of having local, community provider options for Veterans to augment services available at VA-operated facilities. Another item in the Rescue Plan is \$400M directed to retraining programs for unemployed Veterans; these resources may enable health centers to further support Veteran employment efforts.

Federal Advisory Representation: Another way to ensure that health centers are "at the table" when priorities, policies and programs are being considered is to have health center representatives as appointed members of formal Federal Advisory Committees. One such advisory group is the Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee (VRHAC). We have had success getting health center representatives appointed to this Committee in the past, and we are encouraged that 2 health center leaders submitted applications to a recent solicitation for nominations. If you are interested in getting information about future nomination solicitations, please contact me (gcapra@nachc.com) or Dick Bohrer (dbohrer@nachc.com).

Program/Operations Assistance: As mentioned above, we continue to communicate with VA career staff about opportunities to expand VA/Health Center collaboration.

- Work with a VA innovation center is showing progress for a pilot project to provide access to health center oral health services.
- We also continue to monitor health center efforts to become recognized providers in one of the VA's Community Care Networks (CCN). ***As of 12/30/2020, 85 unique health center organizations had at least one of their delivery sites enrolled in a CCN.***

Thank You, Stay in Touch, Spread the Word: If you have questions, need or can share additional information or know of people who may want to join this Interest Group, please contact NACHC's Trainings and Technical Assistance Division at trainings@nachc.org.

- Our staff points of contact are Gina Capra (gcapra@nachc.com) or Dick Bohrer (dbohrer@nachc.com).

Please share information about the Veterans Interest Group with your colleagues. Check out additional information on NACHC's "Supporting Our Veterans" webpage <https://www.nachc.org/health-center-issues/special-populations/veterans/>

Thanks for ALL the work you are doing and looking forward to meeting in person SOON!!