

Roundtable Discussion Summary

“Wounded Warrior and Family-Caregiver Support: DoD-VA-Community Collaborations”

Do we have too much of a good thing? Are services and programs still siloed? What do we need to do in the face of expected military budget cuts? Those questions shaped much of the discussion by Warrior-Family Roundtable attendees at the third meeting sponsored by the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) and Zeiders Enterprises, Inc.

The November 9, 2011 session, again hosted by the Chicago School of Professional Psychology, focused on collaboration by the Departments of Defense (DoD) and the Veterans Affairs. As was true in previous sessions, time was dedicated to increasing awareness and gaining feedback about programs and services available to wounded warriors, their families and caregivers and service providers.

While government representatives were generally positive about the number and overlap of available programs, saying the initiatives provide a safety net for warriors and family-caregivers, one veteran caregiver countered that multiple services may be burdensome in times of crisis.

The increase in service programs, the attendee said could be described as ‘too much of a good thing’ that has resulted in an increase in bureaucracy and confusion. She added, that “I have enough business cards to wall paper a room - but I still don’t know what those people do.”

The VA has worked with DoD to provide new resources aimed to help caregivers, but some family members in attendance expressed frustration with their inability to fully access available resources. Communications across programs and with

Caregiver Support Program Update

- Federal Recovery Coordination Program is a joint DoD-VA initiative that provides support for the recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration of severely injured, ill or wounded Service Member or Veteran. For information call 1-877-732-4456 or logon to www.oefoif.va.gov; www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov.
- DoD Recovery Coordination Program is managed by Military Service Wounded Warrior Programs and provides support to wounded, ill and injured Service Members to ensure they get the non-medical support they need to create the life they want. For information logon to www.warriorcare.dodlive.mil.
- VA Caregiver Support Program provides a wide range of services to Caregivers of eligible Veterans of all eras and additional services, including a monthly stipend for post-9/11 wounded warriors. For information and application support call 1-855-260-3274 or logon to www.caregiver.va.gov.

Some Suggested Topics for Future Discussions

- Expand WFR exchange around care coordination and caregiver support
- Wounded warrior-caregiver issues – fears, expectations and planning for long term medical, personal & financial matters to include expected government support
- Disability rights, privacy, and benefit programs and issues, and understanding eligibility for Social Security, Medicare/Medicaid, health and life insurance, in vitro fertilization, DoD-VA benefits
- Issues related to specific populations, i.e. women veterans, Guard-Reserves, and family members
- Wounded Warrior-family member reemployment

beneficiaries have improved with establishment of support programs like the VA-DoD Federal Recovery Coordinators and Caregiver Support Coordinators. However, workload and issues around transitions continue to present challenges. Changes to regulations, organizational relationships and program designs result in challenges in determining who to contact and where to go for the help. Awareness of existing programs and their requirements must be shared by both family members and providers. Attendees said government and program representatives should know what's available if they are to fully support families - especially when they are faced with changes in status or location. Program coordination and cooperation is essential.

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Understanding and dealing with issues of authority vs. control were important to attendees but many expressed a need for program metrics. The force drawdown and expected budget cuts may require reduction in services, but ensuring the best ones remain in place will require a demonstration of effectiveness. "We need to know what's working and what's not" said one attendee.

Program definitions and eligibility criteria also need to be well conceived and consistent. One attendee cited examples of how definitions of 'family' or 'seriously wounded, ill or injured' can significantly impact benefits. We need to review existing policies and programs, she added, and get an idea of the government's long term plan for taking care of this population of warriors-families.

Help with planning continues to be a priority for some and the seeming lack of progress in the military completing and sharing with the VA its Comprehensive Recovery Plans, a particular area of concern. While compensation for caregivers has been generally lauded, attendees worry about unintended consequences on social security

eligibility because the VA stipend is non-taxable. Other attendees voiced concern about the long-term effects on caregivers as they age. Many families, so often focused on immediate needs, haven't had time to plan for the future needs. But planning is important and must take into account anticipated and unexpected changes in medical conditions, benefits and support services, as well as specialized training or education that will be required of the family-caregiver. Attendees suggested that DoD and VA fully engage the wounded warriors-caregiver/families to gain valuable feedback as to what programs are working and areas that could be improved upon. As one TBI-Amputee veteran said, "I want to be involved in my care—right now I don't have a voice. Participants agreed that there are 'lots of people that care' but ensuring service members, families and caregivers have access to the right benefits at the right time is still a challenge. Many in attendance said opportunities like the Roundtables give them a chance to hear the "ground truth' from a variety of perspectives which will help everyone identify solutions.

The MOAA-Zeiders Warrior Family Roundtable is an outgrowth of the 5th Annual Defense Forum (DFW) that examined the transformational effects of extended war on military forces and their families.

Participants in this roundtable: Ms. Heather Ansley; Ms. Leslye Arsh; Ms. Tamra Avrit; Ms. Patricia Barron; Ms. Meredith Beck; Ms. Julie Brown; Mr. Philip Burdette; Mr. Fred Caison; Ms. Margaret Campbell-Kotler; CDR (USN-Ret) René Campos; Mr. Doug Carmon; Mr. Dave Carroll; Mr. Charles Ciccolella; CDR David Crumbley, USN; Dr. Lynda Davis; Ms. Lynette Fraga; Ms. Lorna Geggis; Mrs. Karen Goldern, Mr. Blake Hall; Ms. Jean Hand; Mr. Jed Johnson; Ms. Linda Kreter; Mr. Mike McDonald; Ms. Monique Rizer; Dr. Kathleen Roth; Ms. Kelly Russell; ADM (USN-Ret) Norb Ryan, Jr.; SGT (USA Ret) Loyd Sawyer, Ms. Andrea Sawyer; Dr. Timothy Shannon; Ms. Nancy St Claire; Dr. Orlando Taylor; Mr. Elvin Valenzuela; Ms. Sarah Wade; Sgt (USR-Ret) Ted Wade; Ms. Carol Weese; Ms. Cathy Wiblemo; Col(USAF Ret) Cherie Zadlo; Mr. Mike Zeiders.

The roundtable was moderated by Ms. Meredith Beck.