

The background of the entire page is a close-up, slightly blurred image of the American flag, showing the stars and stripes in a draped, wavy pattern. The colors are muted, with a soft blue, red, and white. The text is overlaid on this background.

Clark County Veterans Resource Committee

Strategic Plan

Adopted August 12, 2009

Clark County Veterans Resource Committee – 2009 Task Force Advisory Recommendations on Veterans’ Needs in Clark County

Introduction

In 2009, board members of the Clark County Veterans’ Resource Committee (CCVRC) conducted a formal process to identify and adopt strategic community and organizational directions for their Veterans related priorities for years 2009 through 2012. Participating in a series of educational briefings highlighting the needs and issues facing our growing county Veterans’ population, members of the CCVRC completed the process by voting on a list of potential action areas reflecting their multi-meeting discussions.

Through this process the CCVRC identified the following strategic priorities:

<p style="text-align: center;">Clark County Veterans by the Numbers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 39,022 Veterans▪ 725 active military▪ 2,788 Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans▪ 2 Major Veterans Campuses
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1. **Advancing** the development and implementation of practices that have been demonstrated to increase a Veteran’s access to services, benefits and providers
2. **Identifying** potential community partners and promoting collaborations to maximize or secure new resources benefiting Clark County’s Veterans
3. **Increasing** the CCVRC and community’s knowledge of our returning Veterans issues as well as the supporting services, benefits and programs
4. **Measuring and evaluating** the effectiveness of available programs, partnerships and practices

In April 2009, the CCVRC invited their members to serve on a task force whose charge was to develop advisory recommendations advancing the identified strategic Veterans’ priorities. Eight CCVRC members volunteered to serve on this body: Peggy Sheehan (CCVRC Chair), Bob Nichols (Co-Chair), Mike Gibson, John Russell, Ron Brandon, Mark Woods and Ray Saranto. Pete Munroe and Samantha Whitley with Clark County provided ongoing support and assistance to the Task Force. Donald Lachman was engaged by the county to offer additional professional services to assist the task force in their charge.

To help frame advisory recommendations associated with their strategic priorities, the task force adopted a set of values or guiding principles that included:

1. Maximizing existing resources and funding;
2. Ensuring that public funds are spent wisely and with positive impacts;

3. Promoting actions that are a “hand up, not a hand out” to advance Veterans recovery, stability, self-reliance and dignity;
4. Advancing demonstrated best practices and promising approaches; and
5. Increasing the committee’s formal communications, influence and collaborations with community leaders and providers as well as other funders.

Additionally, several key themes emerged from the task force. Participants expressed a desired to explore a broader approach to Veterans services including:

1. System advocacy and improvements;
2. Best practices that help prevent Veterans from becoming indigent; and
3. Best practices that help Veterans recover from indigency

History

Washington is one of only six states with an increasing veteran population. With over 670,000 veterans, Washington has the sixth highest population of veterans in any state. Clark County contributes over 39,000 Veterans to that total with over 2,770 of them representing our Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) Veterans. Additionally the county is home to over 700 active duty members as well as major VA facilities and campuses.

In the 1880s, Washington’s new legislature was alarmed by the very public plight of disabled and homeless veterans. The legislature asked the counties to join them in taking substantial responsibility for assisting veterans who served their country honorably. In 1888, state law was enacted mandating that counties collect revenues for providing assistance to indigent and suffering veterans.

This law, originally known as the Soldiers and Sailors Relief Fund, is now called the Veterans Assistance Fund (VAF). It is the responsibility of each of Washington's 39 counties to manage their own VAF and as a result there are 39 different ways of managing these funds. Clark County has a long-standing history of commitment and services to its veterans.

Expanded Charge and Long Term Solutions

Traditionally, Washington’s County Veterans Bureaus have focused on a narrow range of relief services for indigent veterans. Assistance frequently includes rental vouchers, utility payments and food vouchers as well as critical linkages. These services provide valuable support, helping many veterans and their family members in a time of stress and need.

However, providing only temporary relief in the absence of also advancing long-term solutions only maintains some individuals in an indigent or near indigent state. It may contribute to a personal belief of entitlement and abuse by individuals taking advantage of the system’s limitations and charge while struggling year in and out with poverty and other issues.

In 2005, Representative Moeller and other legislative leaders worked with county and state Veterans organizations to pass House Bill (HB) 1189. It was the first substantial change to county veterans' services enabling legislation in 125 years.

The purpose of HB 1189 was to improve county services to veterans by:

- Enabling contracting for services and best practices
- Employing a broader interpretation of veterans considered eligible for county services
- Requiring formal communications and involvement between Veterans Advisory Boards and local elected officials

Clark County Planning

Led by Co-Chairs Peggy Sheehan and Bob Nichols and supported by the County, the task force conducted a series of work sessions which included: identifying veterans needs and service gaps, examining programs as well as best practices, reviewing data and information, interviewing local veterans' services providers, soliciting information from other county veterans bureaus as well as a mix of ongoing discussions, research and analysis.

Research and analysis became a critical activity of the Task Force. Members examined the following subject areas:

1. County veterans demographics
2. Background and analysis of House Bill 1189
3. Traumatic brain injuries
4. PTSD/mental health needs
5. Employment challenges
6. Incentives for hiring veterans
7. Substance abuse and co-occurring disorders in veterans
8. Veterans Resource Centers
9. Veterans courts
10. Case management

Veterans Needs and Service Gaps

Task force members identified four major areas of need:

1. Improved Veterans access and linkages to existing housing, services and benefits;
2. Increased community awareness and investments in Veterans housing and services;
3. Dedicated facility and service environment exclusively for Clark County Veterans; and
4. Increased employment opportunities for Clark County Veterans.

At Work Session Number Three, task force members had the opportunity to interview Mike Wilbur with the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs as well as Sally Garcia with Worksource. Mike's written response and discussions with the task force highlighted the opportunity to improve connections to existing community resources and maximize their impact to veterans. He also detailed the benefits of improving the practices employed to identify veterans in the community with

improvements to the identifying language and referral protocols. Sally discussed WorkSource's efforts to connect veterans to employment training and employers and the need to increase the job opportunities for our veterans.

Task Force Findings

1. Improved training, protective armor and medical advances are saving veterans who would have historically died from their combat injuries-- for every fatality there are 16 long-term disabling injuries;
2. Hundreds of our county OEF and OIF Veterans will struggle with long-term physical and emotional injuries associated with their deployment to combat;
3. OEF and OIF Veterans have increased rates of substance abuse and co-occurring disorders;
4. OIF and OEF Veterans are experiencing higher unemployment rates because of the economy; and
5. Clark County lacks adequate housing resources for Veterans who comprise a disproportionate percentage of the chronically homeless population.

Task Force Conclusions

1. Clark County possesses many community resources offering valuable benefits and services to Veterans;
2. Clark County Veterans, like many communities, fail to maximize the significant federal resources and benefits available exclusively to Veterans;
3. Increasing case management support for formal service plans will improve the likelihood of successful outcomes for the Veterans and their families;
4. Increased activities with employers to connect them to incentive programs and Veterans could improve Veterans' employment opportunities;
5. Clark County and the community would realize significant benefits from a centralized location offering comprehensive services and housing;
6. Improving the coordination of housing stock and landlord relations would increase access to housing and maximize existing resources; and
7. Clark County is fortunate to have a strong cadre of community leaders committed to improving the quality of life for our Veterans and their families.

Task Force Recommendations

The task force offers the following advisory recommendations for consideration, which advance strategic community priorities adopted by the CCVRC members. Task force members voted to prioritize their select action areas and that resulted in a tie for item number three. Their priorities are as follows:

1. **Case management – Direct Assistance Program** - Establish a service that supports case management and referral activities to increase direct attention and hands on support for veterans combined with direct assistance payments;
2. **Identification of Veterans** – Develop and promote standardized county wide policies and practices for identifying and referring Veterans to services;
3. **Support Veterans Resource Center and Veterans Housing Liaison** – Advance the development of a centralized comprehensive service and housing center for Veterans; and
4. **Veterans Housing Liaison** – Advance the concept of dedicated staff for maximizing access and information for Veterans and services providers targeting existing housing resources.

Priority Actions, Choices and Oversight

Priority	Recommended Actions	Outcome Linkages to Strategic Priorities	CCVRC Action Steps And Oversight
1	Establish a service that supports case management and referral activities to increase direct attention and hands on support for Veterans.		
	Direct Assistance with Case Management Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maximize services/benefits ▪ Improve access ▪ Build partnerships ▪ Evaluate effectiveness 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Advise key leaders on recommendations and benefits 2. Participate in development of service goals, benchmarks and updates to partners 3. Contribute resources and leadership
2	Advance standardized practices countywide for identifying and referring Veterans to services		
	Countywide Standardized Veterans Practices Identification and Referral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase community awareness Veterans needs ▪ Maximize service/benefits ▪ Improve access ▪ Build partnerships ▪ Sustain improvements ▪ Evaluate effectiveness 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Advise key leaders on recommendations and benefits 2. Participate in development of implementation strategy with benchmarks and reporting 3. Contribute resources and leadership
3A	Establish a Veterans Resource Center offering comprehensive services and assistance		
	Veterans Resource Center Comprehensive Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase access ▪ Maximize resources ▪ Veterans focused environment 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct work session and identify actions to support existing local efforts 2. Encourage public and private support 3. Participate in development of timeline 4. Contribute resources and leadership
3B	Establish a position (Veterans Housing Liaison) whose charge includes maximizing access to and use of existing housing resources by the county's Veterans services & providers.		
	Veterans Housing Liaison Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maximize resources ▪ Increase access ▪ Improve outcomes 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Advise key leaders on recommendations 2. Participate in development of service goals 3. Collaborate with Clark County to advance 4. Contribute resources housing linkages and leadership

Additional Priority Considerations

Priority	Recommended Actions	Outcome Linkages to Strategic Priorities	CCVRC Action Steps And Oversight
4	Develop and implement a formal community education and marketing plan which increases awareness and meaningful support for Clark County's Veterans		
	Community Education and Marketing Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maximizes resources and benefits ▪ Promote community collaborations ▪ Increase community awareness and support ▪ Evaluate outcomes 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Advise key leaders on recommendations 2. Participate in development of community education plan , benchmarks and key speaking points 3. Contribute volunteers and funding as needed to implement
5	Support the Jail Reintegration Program, an existing contracted service which has demonstrated significant cost avoidance associated with criminal justice as well as low recidivism for participating Veterans		
	Jail Reintegration Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maximizes resources and benefits ▪ Promote community collaborations ▪ Evaluate outcomes ▪ Reports outcomes 	Consider in future funding needs