

Veterans' Advisory Council
on Mental Health
Fort Harrison, Montana

Bylaws

ARTICLE I-NAME

The name of the Fort Harrison VA consumer council shall be the Veterans' Advisory Council, hereafter referred to as the Council or VAC.

ARTICLE II-PURPOSE

The purpose of the Council is to provide a mechanism for veterans receiving mental health services to communicate needs and suggestions about the care they receive. The council will provide recommendations to the Chief of Behavioral Health Services.

Members can freely express their views and opinions without fear of reprisal, regarding VA mental health services, to assure that all veterans receive the highest quality of services available to them, from the Department of Veterans Affairs and from the community, enabling them to achieve their greatest degree of independence and physical and mental health.

The functions of the council shall be:

1. To develop methods of educating consumers and the community about mental illness and available treatments,
2. To help reduce stigma associated with mental illness,
3. To assist consumers and their families in accessing services and coping more effectively with mental illness,
4. To explore current resources in the community of mental health service providers and work toward establishing formal or informal sharing agreements to more effectively utilize existing resources, minimize duplication of services and create collaborative services to address unmet and/or poorly met needs, and
5. To develop methods of measuring customer satisfaction, advocate for needed changes and set priorities for recommended changes.
6. The council may undertake non-mental health projects of compassion.

ARTICLE III-MEMBERSHIP

Section 1. Size

The Council will be comprised of not less than ten (10) members. **Four (4)** of the members will be veterans. All officers must be members of the Council. Officers may be added or removed by consensus of the Council.

Section 2. Membership Qualifications and Duties

Qualifications

Council members must be at least one of the following:

1. A consumer of VA Behavioral Health Services (a veteran),
2. A family member or advocate of a VA behavioral health consumer,
3. A veterans' service organization staff member, and/or
4. A member of a community behavioral health service or group.
5. Non-Veteran family members have equal status on the Council.

Duties and Responsibilities

1. Regularly attends (defined by Section 7, number 4) and participates in Council and subcommittee meetings,
2. Recruits new members as needed, and
3. Assists council officers in completing their duties as requested by Council members.

Section 3. Officers

The officers of the Council shall consist of the following:

Chair
Co-Chair
Scribe
Web Manager

Section 4. Officer Qualifications and Duties

Chair

Qualifications

1. Demonstrates leadership abilities and experience, and
2. Effectively communicates orally and in writing to council members, VA staff and community members.

Duties and Responsibilities

1. Conducts council meetings,
2. Serves as liaison between the Council and VA providers,
3. Establishes and dissolves subcommittees with the consensus of the Council,
4. Attends subcommittee meetings when possible,
5. Keeps the Behavioral Health Services Chief informed of council activities, problems and progress,
6. Advocates for consumers to the VA, and

7. Determines, with consensus, council meeting agendas.

Co-Chair

Qualifications

1. Is a consumer or family member of a consumer of VA Behavioral Health Services,
2. Demonstrates leadership abilities and familiarity with VA services, and
3. Effectively communicates orally and in writing to the Council and VA staff.

Duties and Responsibilities

1. Assists the Chair in performing his/her duties, and
2. Functions as Chair in the absence of the Chair in performing his/her duties.

Scribe

Duties and Responsibilities

1. Summarizes/synthesizes meeting discussions to relevant and concise minutes,
2. Types, collates, photocopies and distributes written materials in a timely manner,
3. Commits time to perform duties, and
4. Has access to office equipment such as computer email, copy machine, etc. needed to carry out assigned duties.

Web Manager

Duties and Responsibilities

1. Responds to website inquiries; notifies Chair regarding issues of concern,
2. Inserts links to other mental health related sites,
3. Adds revised Surveys, Bylaws, Minutes, Agenda, etc. to the website,
4. Has access to a computer, email and the Internet, and
5. Commits time to perform duties.

Section 5. Staff

The VAC will have a staff liaison(s) of whose responsibility will be to assist the council with access to needed resources. The staff liaison will also communicate concerns to the Chief of Behavioral Health Services on behalf the council.

Section 6. Appointment

New members can be nominated by any existing council member, can be self-nominated or can be nominated by VA Behavioral Health Services. The nominating member or nominee should present the prospective new member's background and qualifications to the council for acceptance, with membership dependent upon council consensus of acceptance. All members can potentially chair the Council.

New officers can be nominated for appointment by any existing council member or can be self nominated and must be current members of the council. Officers are elected by a majority of the vote of the council during annual general elections, or during special elections called by the Council Chair.

Section 7. Resignation

Members may resign from the Council at any time by providing either written notification to the council or verbal notification to the Council Chair or Co-Chair.

Section 8. Removal

Members can be removed from the council or a committee for the following reasons:

1. The member's status changes (see above qualifications),
2. The member is no longer able to fulfill their council responsibilities or has not fulfilled their respective responsibilities, and
3. The member's behavior is disruptive and inhibits the Council's ability to function efficiently.

In these instances, the Council Chair will notify the member of possible removal. The Council must reach consensus for removal.

Section 9. Vacancy

A vacancy shall exist whenever a member resigns or is removed from the Council.

A vacancy in the office of Chair will be filled by the Co-Chair for the remainder of the term of office.

Section 10. Terms of Office

Each officer shall serve for a term of one (1) year, beginning **January 1** and ending **December 31** of each year. Officers may serve consecutive terms, not to exceed three (3) total years in that office, unless there is no other candidate. Council members may only serve four consecutive terms and must have a period of one year's absence in order to be reappointed to the council.

Section 11. Elections and Transfer of Officers

General elections of all officers will occur on the second Tuesday in November of each year. Elections will be conducted with a voice vote unless a question exists and a roll-call vote will be taken.

Section 12. Compensation and Reimbursement

The members of the Council shall serve without compensation or reimbursement.

ARTICLE IV-MEETINGS

Section 1. Schedule

Regular meetings of the Council will be monthly, on the second Tuesday of each month (except July and August), from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. at various locations. Meetings may go beyond 5 p.m. on occasion or begin earlier as needed. Meeting days may vary.

Council will not meet in the months of July and August unless an emergency occurs.

Special meetings of the Council may be called at any time by the Chair.

Special meetings of subcommittees may be called by the Chair or Subcommittee Chair.

Section 2. Notice

The call for regular or special meetings of the Council shall be posted on designated bulletin boards, mailed electronically, to individuals or organizations on the Council mailing list/listserve prior to the meeting. The preferred methods of communication will be electronic mail and web notices.

Section 3. Agenda

The agenda for each meeting is determined by the Chair with consensus from the Council.

Any member may add new business agenda items by making a motion from the floor, having it seconded, and approved by majority vote by the Council for placement on the agenda for the next meeting.

Committee Chairpersons may directly request the Council Chair to add new business items for placement on the agenda for the next meeting.

Section 4. Attendance and Participation

All meetings of the council shall be open to the public. Veterans in particular are encouraged to attend. The last fifteen (15) minutes of each regular meeting of the Council shall be set-aside for members of the public to address the Council. Members of the public may propose new business agenda items for the next meeting, at which time a member of the council can move to have it added as outlined above (section 3).

Any person meeting the qualifications for council membership may attend council meetings and participate in discussion of agenda items. Only council members may propose agenda items, make motions, or vote on resolutions regarding agenda items.

Members or prospective members of the Council may attend and participate via electronic communication such as METNET, teleconference or "Go to Meeting" and the Council shall make provisions for such attendance.

Section 5. Absences

Members are expected to attend all regular meetings of the Council. If unable to attend, the member should notify the Council Chair or Co-Chair and request to be excused. Multiple unexcused absences may result in removal from the Council. (see Article III - section 8).

Section 6. Quorum

A quorum of the council shall exist if five (5) or more members are present. No resolutions may be passed at a meeting of the Council if a quorum is not reached.

Section 7. Alternates

There shall be no proxies for meetings of the Council. Members must be present to vote on any business of the Council.

Section 8. Abstention

Members may abstain from voting. Members must abstain from voting where there is a conflict of interest (defined as self-disclosed).

Section 9. Rules of Order

Only items on the meeting agenda may be discussed during meetings.

Any member wishing to speak on an agenda item must be recognized by the Chair and given the floor. Only members who have the floor may speak at that time. The Chair may limit or extend the time a member has the floor for purposes of facilitating discussion and/or maintaining order.

In all procedural matters not governed by these Bylaws, the Council shall follow the provisions of *Robert's Rules of Order*.

ARTICLE V-COMMITTEES

Section 1. Committee Creation and Membership

The Chair may create, dissolve, activate or deactivate committees as needed. Members may volunteer to serve on any committee(s).

Section 2. Committee Meetings

Committee meetings will occur on the second Tuesday (day may vary) of each month unless a holiday occurs on that day. Committee members must be given advance notice of a meeting. Minutes of committee meetings may be distributed at the next regular meeting of the Council. Committee Chairs are responsible for distribution of minutes and reporting of committee activities to the Council.

Section 3. Authority

Actions may be taken by committees only if given authority to do so by the Council.

ARTICLE VI-ANTI-DISCRIMINATION

The Council shall not discriminate in any regard with respect to race, creed, color, sex, age, national origin, sexual orientation, marital status, religion, credit, physical disability/mental disability or political beliefs.

Approved and adopted by the Fort Harrison, Montana Veteran's Advisory Council this _____ day of September, 2011.

Bob Tholt, Council Chair

Alan Fauhl, Co-Chair

Chief, Behavioral Health Services
Fort Harrison, Montana