

## **Recommendation #13: Veterans and Families (2017)**

### **Background**

#### **Creation of "Veterans in Care" - VIC:**

The Nevada Department of Veterans Services established "Veterans in Care" (VIC) initiative launched in May of 2016, with the mission to reach out to all skilled care facilities (SNF), residential care/assisted living facilities (RCF/AL) and outreach to over 400 providers in the state. The next step will be to contact community based care (CBC) service facilities and programs to locate our veterans needing and receiving care and services. This will allow NDVS to collect data that had not been researched before. A letter was sent to all licensed administrators of SNF and RCF/AL facilities in Nevada, requesting information on the location of our veterans in their facilities, how many are receiving benefits and how many are enrolled in the VA medical center system. We are continuing to reach out to providers to assure we have a broad response.

The vision of VIC at this time encompasses three (3) components: Benefits and Programs; Veteran Culture Education and Training; and Quality of Life Recognition and Communication.

#### **Benefits and Programs:**

A primary goal is to advise and educate veterans and their family of potentially untapped Federal VA benefits for which they might be eligible. Eligibility requirements have changed over the years and many of our aging veterans do not realize they may be eligible for benefits not previously accessible. This outreach involves our Nevada Veteran Advocates (NVA) and our Veterans Service Officers (VSO) of the Veterans Advocacy & Support Teams (VAST). The VSO of the NDVS are specialists in evaluating, educating and assisting our veterans and their family members, at no cost to the veteran.

In addition, veteran burial benefits and availability in the two Nevada State Memorial Veterans Cemeteries are not well understood. A veteran may be buried at no cost and there is an option for an additional very low cost for spouse burial.

#### **Veteran Culture Education and Training:**

Facilities that are not veteran specific may or may not understand the influence and impact of a veteran's service experience on their aging process or health care needs. Certainly for those individuals with Alzheimer's and related dementias, many behaviors are misunderstood when they actually may be influenced by past military experiences. Individuals who have served in the military are not always willing to ask for help when needed, and even more importantly, depending on which period of time served, may have "cultural bias" toward certain care providers.

NDVS recognizes that the opportunity to have training on military culture and how it affects successful care giving strategies has not been consistently available to facilities. A key component of VIC is to partner with other state agencies and VA health partners to bring this training to the care facility setting and their front line staff.

**Quality of Life Recognition and Communication:**

This third component of VIC is expansive. Veterans in community care settings often times are not recognized. A primary initiative of acknowledgement and recognition of their service to our country is being developed. The Director of NDVS will be issuing personalized certificates of gratitude to veterans in care for being "Nevada Heroes". These certificates of recognition will be presented in ceremonies within the facilities where the veteran is located when possible. Preliminary data has noted there are between 20 to 50 veterans in many community facilities. Expansion of this recognition initiative will also include additional acknowledgement for those of outstanding service by our Governor, Legislators and Congressional Representatives.