Veteran and Family Advisory Council

Seeking and Listening to Veterans & Families

Mission of the Veteran and Family Advisory Council

The mission of the council is to partner with health care staff to:

- strengthen communication among Veterans, families, and staff
- assist in finding ways to improve safety, satisfaction, and quality of care
- allow staff to listen to and honor Veteran and family choices

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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. What is the purpose of the Advisory Council?

The Veteran & Family Advisory Council (VFAC) serves as a forum to include Veteran and family preferences into improvement efforts, clinical care delivery, and policy creation. VA Palo Alto Health Care System staff meets with the Advisory Council on a monthly basis to receive unfiltered, direct feedback from Veterans and family members. We commit to working collaboratively to build a culture that is Veteran & family centered.

2. How long ago was the Veteran and Family Advisory Council formed?

The first meeting was held with six Veteran and Family Advisors in January, 2010.

3. How many advisors are presently on the council?

The council consists of fifteen Veterans and two family advisors. Staff, while not members of the Council, serve to help facilitate discussions and support the Council activities.

4. How are council members selected?

Veteran and family members are identified by staff, screened, interviewed, and selected based on the following criteria:

- Utilize services at VA Palo Alto Health Care System (or has a family member who uses or previously used services at VAPAHCS)
- Share insights about health care experiences in ways that others can learn from them
- See beyond his/her own personal experiences
- Show concern for more than one issue
- Listen to, consider and respect the viewpoints of others
- Provide suggestions and expresses criticisms in a constructive manner
- Maintain a positive approach and attitude about partnership and teamwork
- Available to attend monthly meetings
- Enthusiasm about contributing to VAPAHCS mission of providing excellent, quality health care. *(Note: Members who are actively receiving care for an acute episode, or are hospitalized, or receiving aggressive medical treatment may be asked to take a leave of absence from the council. A healthcare provider recommendation may be needed to return to the council.)*

5. What are council members' commitments?

- Participation in a 3-4 hour orientation prior to the first council meeting
- Consistent attendance at the monthly meetings
- Active participation in meetings
- Preparation before council meetings, if there are materials or documents that need to be reviewed before the meeting
- Upholding standards of ethics and maintaining patient confidentiality
- Provide prior notification, if unable to attend meetings

7. When and where are the meetings held?

Monthly meetings are held at the Palo Alto Division on the fourth Tuesday of the month from 10:00-1:00 pm. The ability to use video/phone conferencing from other locations is available.

8. How are agendas set?

The Veteran & Family Centered Care Coordinator sets the monthly agendas by scheduling staff who request to meet with the Council in advance. Staff is asked to come prepared with questions, rather than presentations to foster discussion and partnership.

9. Do council members have to be registered with Volunteer Services?

Yes, council members register with Voluntary Services and need to complete the typical volunteer on boarding process.

10. Are members of the council paid?

No, the members do not receive compensation for their services on the Veteran & Family Advisory Council.

11. How will success of the council be measured?

The council's success is part process and part outcome. The process of listening to the Veteran and family voice is important in and of itself. Creating an arena for staff to hear different perspectives, incorporate suggestions and work together to improve the services and care we provide is part of being successful. Our aim is to become a credible, valuable body that truly helps staff succeed in providing quality care and services for all Veterans.

Core Principles of Veteran & Family Centered Care (adapted from the Institute for Patient and Family Centered Care)

Dignity & Respect	Information Sharing	Participation	Collaboration
Listen to and honor Veteran & family choices	Share complete, unbiased information	Encourage Veterans and families to participate in care and decision making at the level they choose	Veterans, families, and staff work together to improve clinical care, patient experience, policies, programs, and facility design.

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