



**Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Aging & Older Adult Services
and
Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness
Public Hearing**

**Spring City State Veterans Home
1 Veteran's Drive
Spring City, Pennsylvania**

**Teresa Osborne
Secretary of Aging**

August 28, 2018

Good Morning. Thank you Chairmen Hennessey, Barrar, Samuelson, and Sainato for the opportunity to join you today for this joint hearing on Programs and Assistance for our aging population.

The Pennsylvania Department of Aging (PDA) is formally charged by the federal government, via the Older Americans Act, and the Pennsylvania General Assembly, under Act 71 of 1978, with being a visible and effective advocate for the interests and well-being of older Pennsylvanians.

Created in 1978, the Department serves as the state unit on aging representing Pennsylvania's growing aging population, which presently includes nearly 3 million people age 60 and over. In addition to overseeing an array of benefits, services, and programs that are made available through a network of 52 local area agencies on aging that cover Pennsylvania's 67 counties, the Department is also responsible for representing the commonwealth's interests in the design, implementation, and continuous improvement of long-term services and supports for older Pennsylvanians.

To this end, it is critical that the Department communicates, collaborates, and coordinates its efforts to serve Pennsylvanians in need with its sister-state agencies; recognizing that every day men and women who serve their country come home and often struggle to locate and access home and community-based services. Moreover, in consideration of the high number of veterans who are age 60 and older, it's imperative that the Department works in tandem with the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) in order to connect the growing population of aging veterans and their caregivers with available resources that will help them live and age well, with the dignity and respect they deserve.

On Veterans Day 2013, the Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans' Services was established as Pennsylvania's first interagency cooperative approach to veterans services. The Council reviews, evaluates, and assesses state veterans programs in collaboration with senior staff from state agencies and commissions. It increases information sharing, ensures program fidelity, coordinates complimentary programs and facilitates meaningful enhancements in service accessibility to veterans benefits and services within Pennsylvania. As required, I designated a key staff member, Samantha Cossman, who serves as the Northwest Pennsylvania Regional Coordinator of the Department's Aging and Disability Resource Center to be the person responsible to provide the Council with support, resources, and information necessary to fulfill its duties. Currently, Ms. Cossman, serves as the co-chair of the Council's Aging Committee, working in partnership with Ed Beck, Chief of Operations for the DMVA's State Veterans' Homes.

The opportunity to work collaboratively has been embraced as is evidenced by the efforts and initiatives launched to better connect Pennsylvania's network of local Area Agencies on Aging

with Pennsylvania's network of County Directors of Veterans Affairs so that Pennsylvania's qualified aging veterans and their families can access needed benefits and services.

To provide you with a sense of these efforts, I am pleased to share the following:

- In early 2018, a survey was conducted of all Area Agency on Aging (AAA) Directors seeking feedback on their current relationship with their local County Directors of Veterans Affairs. While the survey was intended to identify gaps and to encourage communication and collaboration, best practices were also identified, which were captured and will be shared via webinars so that counties and regions can learn from one another in order to better link aging veterans and their families to available benefits and services that they may be eligible to receive. Currently, we are working with Communication and Information & Technology staff to create a joint DMVA and PDA message to the AAA Directors and the County Directors of Veterans Affairs that will immediately link them to one another.
- The above-mentioned survey also included a question asking the local AAA network if they were interested in helping the commonwealth pursue expanding access to the Veterans Directed Home and Community-Based Services program currently underway. Similar to the Aging Waiver Program, the Veterans Directed Home and Community-Based Services program is designed to allow veterans, who are potential candidates for nursing home placement to receive that level of care in their homes, their caregivers' homes or in non-supportive, independent living communities. The program provides the veteran with a budget and allows them to choose their own care providers in place of receiving care services from the Veterans Administration Health Care System. In some cases, family members of the veteran can be paid for the care they provide. The Veterans Directed Home and Community-Based services program is presently available only in the Philadelphia, Coatesville, and Erie areas. The survey results yielded that multiple AAAs, which are within a Veterans Integrated Services Network, known as a VISN, were indeed interested in exploring this expansion. At present, the DMVA is in communication with VISN 4, which is the Veterans Integrated Services Network that Pennsylvania participates in, to determine if VISN 4 will work with Pennsylvania to pursue this service expansion for Pennsylvania's aging veterans.
- PDAs Aging and Disability Resource Center, also known as the PA LINK, shared a 2017 Veterans Day message that was created in collaboration with DMVA, in order to recognize their service and to create pathways to educate and connect them to available services for which they may be eligible.

- PDAs Aging and Disability Resource Center and its PA LINK leadership is currently leading conversations with the DMVA and its local County Veterans Affairs Offices to create connections with Pennsylvania's two Alzheimer's Association chapters; Greater Pennsylvania and Delaware Valley in order to either develop or strengthen relationships so that Pennsylvania Veterans with Alzheimer's disease or other related dementias and their caregivers can be linked to support and services. Moreover, the conversation being fostered also includes the potential for a direct referral process for Veterans providers to the Care Consultation Program offered by the Alzheimer's Association.
- Lastly, I would like to comment on the work that is underway to ensure that the statutory requirements of Act 69 of 2017 are met so that the DMVA is supported in its responsibility to ask those seeking services from all state agencies if they ever served in the United States Armed Forces, to help any veteran who desires to be include in Pennsylvania's Veterans Register, and to locate the nearly 820,000 veterans in the commonwealth in order to provide outreach and information related to them. With guidance from the Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services and its Aging Committee, the Aging Network is being educated on Act 69 so that we can ensure that at the first point of contact, the caller is being asked if they are a veteran, and if so, they are educated on Pennsylvania's Veteran Registry and support is offered in order to ultimately link the veteran to the services and benefits they may be eligible to receive.

The opportunity to share some insight into how the Department of Aging supports veterans; either through our own efforts or through collaboration with the DMVA is appreciated. While exciting things are happening, we recognize the need to do more so that our aging veterans and the baby-boomers coming behind them are informed, engaged, empowered, supported, and, when necessary, protected from all types of abuse. These brave Pennsylvanians who served our country and our commonwealth deserve nothing less than our best efforts to support their desire to live independently and age well in their homes and communities. I look forward to any suggestions or questions that you may have.