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Subject: VetSET uses health departments, Network of Care to reach Nebraska vets

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VetSET uses health departments, Network of Care to reach vets

By STEVE LIEWER / World-Herald News Service

LINCOLN, Neb. — A group of Nebraska public health directors on Wednesday unveiled a two-year, \$2 million program to better connect veterans in rural parts of the state with services designed to make life better for them and for their families.

The goal of the initiative, called VetSET, is to reach out to military veterans in rural areas, link them with government and nonprofit agencies who can support them, and to boost knowledge of military culture and needs among small-town health professionals.

The project is funded through one of five rural health grants awarded across the country last year by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

VetSET, created and run by the Nebraska Association of Local Health Directors, is the first to use public health departments to connect with veterans, said Susan Bockrath, the group's executive director.

"This is an approach that's outside the box," Bockrath said. "We're the only ones anywhere in the country doing anything like this."

The association hired Teri Clark, an Air Force veteran, to lead a team of VetSET coordinators around the state to set up programs in the 15 district health departments (out of 20 in the state) that it represents. Those departments cover 71 of the state's most rural counties.

Those coordinators already have been working with veterans organizations and veteran service officers around the state to find people who have served in the military. They've also put on displays at local health fairs and used social media or face-to-face contact.

"There's no one place to find them," said Jeremy Eschliman, director of the Two Rivers Public Health Department, which is based in Holdrege and covers seven counties in south-central Nebraska. "They assimilate into the population, and you don't even know where they're at."

About 75 people attended the informational session, including Lt. Gov. Mike Foley; Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska's adjutant general; and State Sens. Sue Crawford of Bellevue and Mark Kolterman of Seward.

Some of the training provided by the group is as simple as teaching doctors and nurses to ask patients whether they served in the military. If they did, it can make them eligible for an array of services from the VA and other organizations.

They also need to know that many veterans are reluctant to seek help because the military trains them to be self-sufficient.

"We're taught resilience," Clark said. "When you hear a peep from a service member, that's a cry. That's a scream."

The VetSET coordinators already are finding that some of the veterans' strongest needs are in areas having nothing to do with public health. They may need help, for example, finding a job or learning how to manage finances.

A centerpiece of the VetSET program is a website, the [Network of Care for Veterans, Service Members & Their Families](#), that lets Nebraska veterans connect with all kinds of services near them.

"We're really proud of it," said Bruce Bronzan, president of Trilogy Integrated Resources, the California-based firm that developed the site. "It is the one place where you can find everything."

The association is in a race to prove the worth of VetSET before the VA grant runs out at the end of next year. They hope the state or nonprofits will step in.

“We are looking actively for partners and support to keep this going,” she said.

If you have any questions or would like a more in-depth demonstration of how the Network of Care works, please contact me anytime at Bruce@trilogyir.com or (415) 458-5900.

Thank you,

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