

# VETERANS UPDATE

VOLUME 6, ISSUE 7 JULY, 2020

## VA PROVIDENCE WELCOMES DIRECTOR



The Department of Veterans Affairs announced June 19 the appointment of Lawrence Connell as the new director of the VA Providence Healthcare System.

Connell oversees a comprehensive health care system providing care to more than 35,000 Veterans from Rhode Island and southeastern Massachusetts, the Cape and Islands.

Ryan Lilly, network director for the VA New England Healthcare System, said he was pleased with the announcement, "His sound leadership qualities and proven experience will be valuable assets for the facility, the employees and volunteers, and for the Veterans we are honored to serve."

Connell previously served as the chief of staff for the Veterans

## UPCOMING EVENTS

*In-person events and meetings are being rescheduled during the response to COVID-19.*

**Wednesdays in July and August** — no meeting July 22 and Aug. 26 — **Women Veteran Networking Group**, 11 a.m. - 12 p.m., phone meeting, 800-767-1750, code 36090#

Health Administration, in Washington, D.C. He is a retired Army colonel who served more than 30 years as a medical service officer and medical evacuation pilot.

A Rhode Island native, Connell holds a Bachelor of Science in communications from the University of Rhode Island and a master's degree in international relations from Troy State University.

## KEEP YOUR MENTAL HEALTH APPOINTMENTS

You can keep your mental health appointments during the response to the coronavirus! VA offers video and phone mental health care options that do not require you to visit in person.

Ask your provider or visit <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/coronavirus/index.asp>.

Any Veteran in crisis and their loved ones can always call 800-273-8255 and press 1 to reach the Veterans Crisis Line for confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You can also text 838255 or chat on the website at <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>.



## “BAD PAPER” VETERANS CAN STILL FILE A CLAIM



From the top left, VA Providence Regional Benefits Office employees Paul Levesque, Lindsay Amherst, Lindsay Schwalm, Cyndi Baxter, Chris Aragao, Michael Acheampong, and Tyler Smith (Providence VBA Regional Office photos).

By Mark Ramos, Providence VBA Regional Office Public Affairs Officer

**A** Veteran with “bad paper” is now receiving benefits thanks to a team of claims processors at the VA Providence Regional Benefits Office.

After Lindsay Amherst, military sexual trauma, or MST, coordinator for the regional office, spoke at an event, an attendee passed her contact information to a homeless Veteran frustrated with the claims process.

When the Veteran contacted Amherst, she reviewed the claim folder and noticed a problem with a Character of Discharge decision. The resulting other-than-honorable discharge — sometimes called bad paper — was the basis for a denial of compensation. Amherst referred the claim for quality review.

Veterans service representative Paul Levesque reviewed the claim and determined that the previous Character of Discharge decision was actually an error. Levesque’s coach, Michael Acheampong, and Rating Team coach Chris Aragao agreed. A new decision characterizing the

Veteran’s discharge as honorable for VA purposes was placed into the Veteran’s file.

Tyler Smith, MST rating coordinator, then worked with Amherst to request the previously overlooked medical opinion for the Veteran’s mental health disability claim. The VA Boston Compensation and Pension team quickly responded and with a favorable opinion in hand, Smith was able to grant compensation at the 100 percent rate, retroactive to the day after discharge in February 2017.

Authorization quality review specialists Lindsay Schwalm and Cyndi Baxter processed the award, which resulted in a retroactive payment of more than \$108,000!

“You have an amazing team ... You have changed not only my life, but others for whom I can use this money to assist. In a terrifying time in our country and around the world, people like you and those on your team, step in and become heroes,” the Veteran said in an email to Amherst.

Veterans with bad paper can still apply for VA benefits. Despite the precautions in response to the coronavirus pandemic, VBA em-



### Providence VA Medical Center

830 Chalkstone Ave  
Providence, RI 02908  
401-273-7100

Veteran’s Crisis Line:  
800-273-8255 press 1

Patient Call Center (PCC):  
401-457-3336

Pharmacy Call Center:  
866-400-1241

Website:  
[www.providence.va.gov](http://www.providence.va.gov)

Facebook:  
[facebook.com/  
VAProvidence](https://facebook.com/VAProvidence)

Twitter:  
[twitter.com/VAProvidence](https://twitter.com/VAProvidence)

employees are still working remotely, keeping their eye on their mission to provide Veterans with the benefits they have earned.

For more information, call 800-827-1000, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Eastern Time, or visit the VBA Providence website at <https://www.benefits.va.gov/providence/>.