

## **Implementation of Community Covenant**

The Community Covenant is Multnomah County's pledge to develop local partnerships that will improve the quality of life for service members, veterans, and their families. The Community Covenant Steering Committee developed the covenant, as well as a report with issue-based action plans to enhance collaboration between service providers in order to best support veterans and their families. The Multnomah County Veterans Task Force, both in its role as an advisory body to the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners and a convener for county departments and local organizations, is integral to its implementation.

For each of ten issues, identified by the 2012 member survey of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, the Community Covenant action plans define the issue, lists the action steps that each stakeholder group can use, and available resources to help attain that goal. In addition, the action plans identify barriers and issues for further analysis. The Multnomah County Veterans Task Force will explore these issues, identify programmatic or policy revisions, and advise on further action steps to achieve the goals of the Community Covenant.

The full-text version of the Multnomah County Community Covenant is available at:  
<http://web.multco.us/ds4/veterans-community-covenant>

### **Issues identified in the Veterans Community Covenant:**

#### **Accessing Benefits:**

Vision: In Multnomah County we are committed to ensuring that Veterans and their families receive all state and federal benefits available to them. In the 2012 fiscal year, Oregon was the beneficiary of \$1.9 billion of federal Veterans Affairs payments to or on behalf of Veterans; \$326.8 million of these payments were in Multnomah County. These earned benefits assist Veterans in being more productive and self-sufficient citizens, and we are committed to assisting Veterans to navigate the claims process as quickly and smoothly as possible.

#### **Criminal Justice:**

Vision: We are committed to developing a coordinated approach within the local criminal justice system for identifying military Veterans, recognizing and assessing the unique needs, and systematically referring them to other services in the community.

#### **Education:**

Vision: We are committed to supporting Veterans' access to education and workforce development. Our community will work to inform and advocate for full utilization of the various education benefits available to Veteran from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs. In addition, we will strive to develop and maintain a sufficient infrastructure at colleges and universities to successfully recruit and accommodate Veteran students at their campuses.

#### Employment:

Vision: We are committed to ensuring that Veterans and their family members are able to access and retain living-wage jobs when re-entering the workforce. We will support them in transitioning skills learned in the military to the civilian workforce and promote cultural competency within businesses and other organizations in order to decrease the unemployment rate for this population.

#### Families:

Vision: We are committed to helping families get the support that they need, including a service member's spouse, children, and other loved ones. Families are essential to the reintegration of Veterans, yet they also experience - directly or indirectly - many of the same traumatic issues as the service member during deployment and upon return.

#### Health Care:

Vision: We are committed to making sure our Veterans and their families receive the best possible health care to meet their needs. Multnomah County has a diverse Veteran population that spans four generations and five major wars. Our community has Veterans who are aging, as well as younger Veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan who commonly return with orthopedic neck, back and knee injuries or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), which is considered a signature injury of these recent wars. We will help Veterans meet their health care needs to promote their quality of life.

#### Housing:

Vision: In Multnomah County we are committed to preventing and diverting Veterans and military families from becoming homeless, re-housing those who have become homeless, and helping Veterans and their families purchase a home through home loan opportunities. Veterans are over-represented among homeless populations, with data indicating that they are also homeless for a longer period of time than non-Veterans. In November 2009, the VA launched a five-year plan to end Veteran homelessness. At the most recent count there were 62,000 homeless Veterans on any given night across the country, including 413 counted in Multnomah County.

#### Mental Health and Addiction:

Vision: Many Veterans and their families need mental health services to help them recover from issues related to their military service. We are committed to partnering with local agencies and organizations serving Veterans to help ensure accessible and affordable care.

#### Suicide Prevention:

Vision: We are committed to developing resources and education for our employees, citizens, and community partners to help decrease the high incidence of suicide among our Veterans and service members.

### Women's Services:

Vision: We are committed to increasing understanding and awareness of issues impacting women in the military, both among women Veterans and in the provider community, to promote an increase in women using services to meet their needs and understanding of services that are available. Since women Veterans may experience different service-related and reintegration issues than their male counterparts, response to meeting these needs has been lagging the demand for service. Of particular importance are health care, mental health treatment, employment, and financial and housing stability.