



BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

AGENDA REQUEST & STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: August 27, 2025

SUBJECT: Veteran Behavioral Health Peer Support Specialist grant from the Oregon Health Authority and request to add a limited duration 1.0 FTE BH Specialist I position

RECOMMENDED MOTIONS:

1. Move to authorize the acceptance of a Veteran Behavioral Health Peer Support Specialist grant from the Oregon Health Authority.
2. Move approval of the request to add a limited duration 1.0 FTE BH Specialist I.

BACKGROUND AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS:

Deschutes County has a military service veteran population of just under 14,000. While there are Veterans Affairs (VA) services and other supports available to veterans, there are often significant barriers to accessing these resources and many veterans are in need of higher levels of support. Oregon's veteran suicide rate is higher than the national average, and veterans with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders are at an even greater risk of suicide than those without these disorders.

The Oregon Health Authority Veteran Peer Support Specialist grant provides funding to support a 1.0 full time equivalent (FTE) Veteran Behavioral Health Peer Support Specialist (VBHPSS), with minimal additional funding allocated to a .05 FTE Peer Support Specialist Lead who provides peer supervision to the VBHPSS as well as to other peers in the County's Behavioral Health programs, and 0.15 FTE Clinical Supervisor who oversees the clinical work of the VBHPSS.

The work of the County's VBHPSS has demonstrated the significant needs and complexities of this population. The program has connected with nearly 100 veterans during the current one-year grant cycle and has experienced challenges in trying to meet their needs with available resources. This program has helped veterans connect to resources for housing, employment, social connections, and medical and mental health services (including mental health and co-occurring substance use treatment services). It has also aided veterans in navigating various systems such as the VA and justice system.

The intensity of the work combined with the level of need in our community has made it challenging for the VBHPSS to fully meet the needs of the veterans served. Many of the

veterans need more support than current staffing can provide. Furthermore, community partners serving veterans are requesting support to help those they serve navigate difficult situations related to mental health or substance use symptoms. A multidisciplinary team with the capacity to provide community-based outreach would improve engagement in treatment.

The original goals of the VBHPSS grant are focused on outreach and engagement, and supporting veterans to access needed services and resources. Many of the veterans encountered need more support than what a peer support specialist can provide.

An ideal service model would include the addition of a Behavioral Health Specialist (BHS) to serve as a dedicated veteran therapist and case manager. This team-based approach would also provide the additional support necessary for sustaining the VBHPSS position.

In April 2025, Deschutes County Health Services approached the Oregon Health Authority to explore the possible opportunity of expanding the County's VBHPSS grant to enhance the program's ability to serve veterans. OHA has approved approximately \$213,000 in additional funding to support a new limited duration BHS I for eighteen months and 15% indirect costs.

Health Services seeks approval from the Board to accept this additional grant funding and also to add a limited duration 1.0 FTE BHS I. If approved, an intergovernmental agreement, and FTE and budget resolutions will be forthcoming.

BUDGET IMPACTS:

Approximately \$450,000 revenue anticipated for the eighteen-month period beginning September 1, 2025, of which \$213,000 is the proposed new funding.

ATTENDANCE:

Kristin Mozzochi, BH Program Manager