

Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs

STRATEGIC PLAN

2023-2027





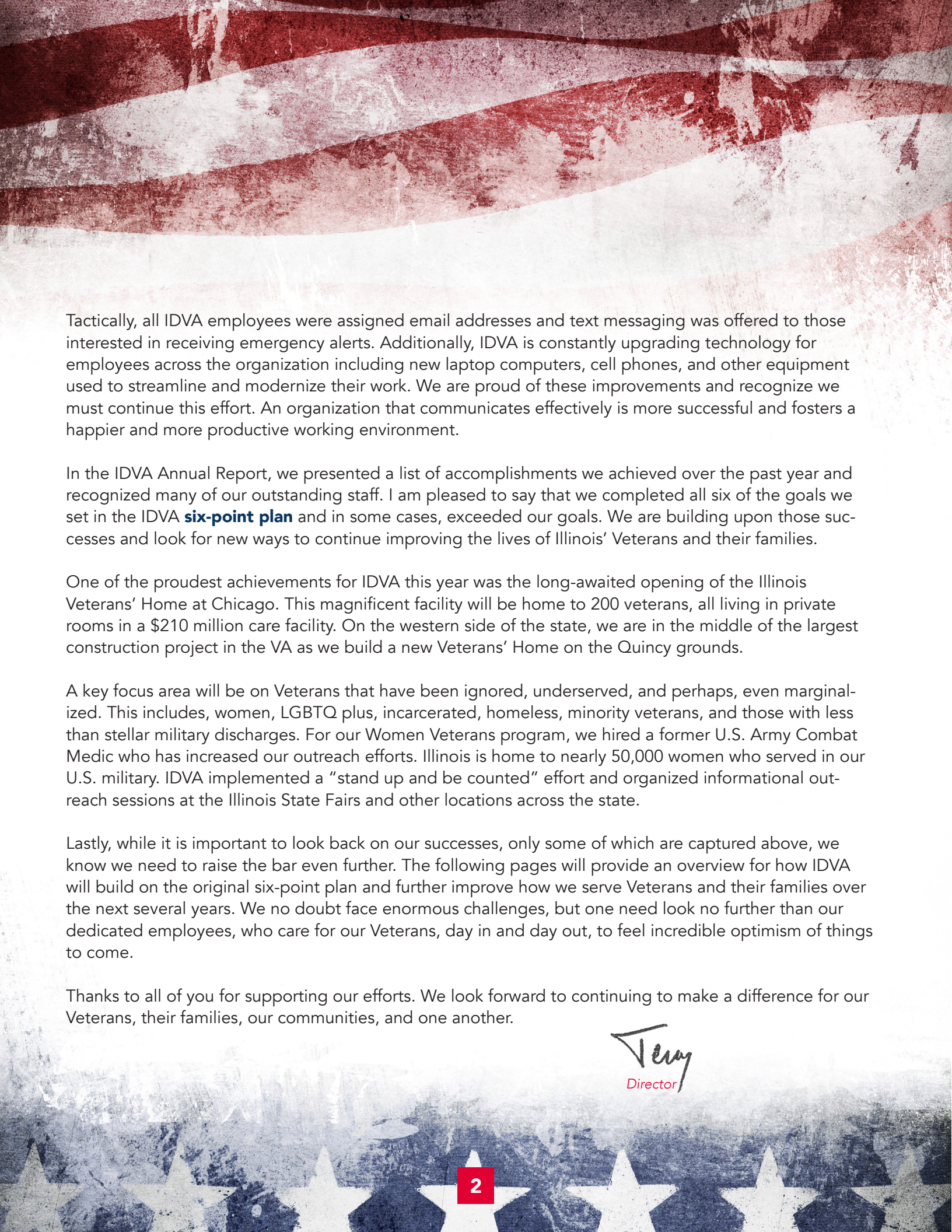
★ LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Since being appointed by Governor JB Pritzker as Director of the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs (IDVA) in April of 2021, it has been a privilege to serve the nearly 600,000 Veterans and their families across Illinois. As a 31-year Veteran of the United States Navy and retired Hospital Corpsman, I am excited to work alongside 1,200 dedicated employees of the IDVA, while teaming up with our partners at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), other State agencies, Illinois Joining Forces (IJF), Illinois Veterans' Advisory Council, Illinois Association of County Veterans Assistance Commissions (IACVAC), and Veterans' service organizations all over Illinois to elevate IDVA's model of Veteran-centric service. Together, we are committed to position Veterans to "thrive in Illinois" through employment, healthcare, housing, education, and other support to build a strong foundation for their future.

Back in 2021, we recognized both the challenges and opportunities facing the department. Drawing on the experiences and recommendations of multiple stakeholders, we developed a **six-point plan** to build a better future for IDVA. This included restructuring our senior leadership to ensure we brought out the best in our team. We hired experts in key roles, enhanced department technology, put infection control front and center, and improved culture and communication at every level of the department.

We recruited top level professionals in their fields to lead the change initiatives within the organization. Assistant Director Anthony Vaughn, a USMC veteran who has served at IDVA for over 18 years, provides institutional knowledge to support the Agency with overarching strategic vision and operational excellence. Our Chief of Staff, Melissa Black, oversees the Agency's day-to-day operations and strategically connects each department while managing arising crises. We also filled a position that had been vacant for some time and needed to look no further than Angela Simmons, who was already serving as the Administrator of the Anna Veterans' Home. Angie, the daughter of an Army Veteran, brings years of real-world experience to her new role as the IDVA Senior Homes Administrator where she leads five administrators at Veterans' Homes across the state.

Open dialogue is integral to success. After multiple visits to the Veterans' Homes, we needed to better communicate directly with the staff—and them to us. This was achieved through our "Veterans Connection" monthly newsletter and weekly "Tuesdays with Terry" message to inform staff of relevant information, events, programs, and policy updates. Our people are encouraged to reach out with their ideas and concerns as we placed a renewed emphasis on providing encouragement, support, and gratitude to our treasured employees.

The background of the page is a stylized, textured American flag. The top half features the red and white stripes, while the bottom half features the blue field with white stars. The texture is grainy and artistic, with some colors appearing more saturated than others.

Tactically, all IDVA employees were assigned email addresses and text messaging was offered to those interested in receiving emergency alerts. Additionally, IDVA is constantly upgrading technology for employees across the organization including new laptop computers, cell phones, and other equipment used to streamline and modernize their work. We are proud of these improvements and recognize we must continue this effort. An organization that communicates effectively is more successful and fosters a happier and more productive working environment.

In the IDVA Annual Report, we presented a list of accomplishments we achieved over the past year and recognized many of our outstanding staff. I am pleased to say that we completed all six of the goals we set in the IDVA **six-point plan** and in some cases, exceeded our goals. We are building upon those successes and look for new ways to continue improving the lives of Illinois' Veterans and their families.

One of the proudest achievements for IDVA this year was the long-awaited opening of the Illinois Veterans' Home at Chicago. This magnificent facility will be home to 200 veterans, all living in private rooms in a \$210 million care facility. On the western side of the state, we are in the middle of the largest construction project in the VA as we build a new Veterans' Home on the Quincy grounds.

A key focus area will be on Veterans that have been ignored, underserved, and perhaps, even marginalized. This includes, women, LGBTQ plus, incarcerated, homeless, minority veterans, and those with less than stellar military discharges. For our Women Veterans program, we hired a former U.S. Army Combat Medic who has increased our outreach efforts. Illinois is home to nearly 50,000 women who served in our U.S. military. IDVA implemented a "stand up and be counted" effort and organized informational outreach sessions at the Illinois State Fairs and other locations across the state.

Lastly, while it is important to look back on our successes, only some of which are captured above, we know we need to raise the bar even further. The following pages will provide an overview for how IDVA will build on the original six-point plan and further improve how we serve Veterans and their families over the next several years. We no doubt face enormous challenges, but one need look no further than our dedicated employees, who care for our Veterans, day in and day out, to feel incredible optimism of things to come.

Thanks to all of you for supporting our efforts. We look forward to continuing to make a difference for our Veterans, their families, our communities, and one another.

Terry
Director

★ IDVA MISSION, VISION, AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Mission

As an expression of our gratitude for their service to our country, we are committed to empowering Veterans and their families to thrive in Illinois. Every encounter we have with them is met with dignity and respect, as we understand the challenges of military service and the lifelong impact it has on their lives.

Vision

Illinois is the destination of choice for Veterans and a national leader in Veteran advocacy and services. IDVA sets the standard for connecting Veterans and their families with all the benefits and privileges they earned to empower them to thrive.



Guiding Principles "TEAM IDVA"

Teamwork

Our diverse and well-trained staff collaborate to achieve the mission of serving Veterans and their families.

Excellence

We are experts in Veteran care and are deeply committed to providing Veteran-centered service through attention to their individual circumstances and dedication to helping them achieve their long- and short-term goals.

Accountability

We provide world-class care in our homes, superior outreach, service to the community, and sound stewardship of taxpayer resources. We listen to the challenges and issues of Veterans and are committed to enhancing and improving our services and how we deliver them.

Motivation

Our highly motivated professionals engage with public and private organizations who serve Veterans and their families. We develop and adopt innovative ideas by utilizing a "one team, one fight" approach to share best practices and deliver on our promise to serve those who served.

★ TEAM IDVA PRIORITIES

Priority #1: Our People

IDVA offers meaningful work to those interested in serving Veterans and presents a wide variety of opportunities in its Residential Homes, Field Locations, and Central Offices. We are a supportive, diverse, and inclusive Agency which fosters positive employee morale and encourages high performance. This environment facilitates achieving the mission of ensuring that Veterans thrive in Illinois.

IDVA action areas:

- Circulate employee satisfaction surveys to get immediate feedback on areas where we can improve across IDVA
- Lead all agencies in our DEI efforts to attract and retain the best people to serve our Veterans
- Fill all open staff positions
- Reinstigate Employee of the Month at all Veterans' Homes, quarterly at Field Services and Headquarters, and annually for the entire agency
- Prepare and administer meaningful employee evaluations
- Establish a leadership training academy for managers
- Enhance our workforce through robust talent development
- Reduce overall discipline and recognize high performance
- Establish an IDVA-specific employee health and wellness program
- Successfully implement the State of Illinois Human Capital Management (HCM) system to modernize our employee pay and benefit systems

“We understand that the reputation of IDVA is defined by our most valuable assets, our people. We will lead by example and ensure that every employee is valued for their contribution. Because, when our employees flourish, Illinois Veterans and their families thrive.”

– Director Prince



Priority #2: Veteran Experience

IDVA is centered around the Veteran in its Residential Homes and those seeking support in our Field Offices. The Central Office supports the overall work of the Agency. The Veteran Services Officers (VSOs) located across the state are positioned to assist the Veteran in accessing their earned benefits. The Agency continues to improve access to the VSOs and upgrade its systems and processes to provide excellent customer service. To offer world-class care in the five Veterans' Homes, IDVA stays apprised of new methods of care and medical technology.

IDVA action areas:

- Establish digital access to all IDVA services
- Streamline Veterans' Homes admission process and increase census
- Increase virtual access to VSO services
- Strive for five star ranking comparative to "Gold Star" accreditation by the Joint Commission and U.S. News and World Reports' "Best Nursing Homes" ranking
- Raise Illinois into the top five of all states in USDVA Compensation and Pension
- Partner with federal, state, and local partners to amplify the level of services available with a special emphasis on historically underserved or ignored Veterans
- Establish a Veteran peer-to-peer network and pop up "welcome home" events across the state

"Nothing is more important to me than ensuring Veterans and their families have access to a modern network of services, backed by dedicated professionals, who always go the extra mile. We have a responsibility to build a level of trust that is often seen in military units where each one of our Veterans know we will absolutely have their backs. Veterans, families, and survivors are our North Star, our reason for existence, and we will leave no stone unturned to help them with the opportunity to thrive in Illinois."

– Director Prince

Priority #3: Operational Excellence

IDVA will deliver the highest level of service to Veterans in Illinois through systems that are effective, efficient, and ethical. Working with our partners, we will constantly improve our processes, procedures, and policies while employing the latest technology to better equip our team to deliver high quality services. Our operations will be the example for all others to follow.

IDVA action areas:

- Increase use of data to drive decision making
- Develop and execute dashboard of IDVA departmental goals
- Publish regular productivity updates on our website
- Initiate project management software to improve inefficiencies
- Balance fiscal budget with focus on Veteran outcomes and staff morale
- Update policies, procedures, and standard operating procedures
- Strive for a clean agency audit
- Strengthen collaborative relationships with our partners at Illinois Joining Forces, Illinois Association of County Veteran Assistance Commission, local and state Veteran Service Organizations, Illinois Veterans Advisory Council, and elected officials

“Not a single naval vessel goes to sea unless the crew are highly trained and policies and procedures are followed. IDVA has a tremendous level of responsibility as we serve Veterans and their families, often in their most vulnerable moments.

Our mission requires attention to every detail as we are dealing with a population who has earned our respect and dedication. The IDVA team will set the example for all agencies, not just in Illinois, but across the Nation.”

– Director Prince

