

ANNUAL REPORT

Fiscal Year 2025



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It is my privilege to present the 2025 Annual Report with gratitude for the support of Governor JB Pritzker, Members of the Cabinet, the Illinois General Assembly and the volunteer members of the Illinois Veterans Advisory Council. Watching over and advocating for our veterans and their families are the more than 1,300 members of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) staff. Their incredible dedication to their work is highlighted in this report.

Illinois is home to one of the largest populations of veterans in the nation and IDVA serves as the premier provider for Illinois veterans to access earned services and benefits. The resources allocated to the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs are transformative for Illinois veterans who are either cared for at our five Veterans' Homes, seeking help from our Veteran Service Officers (VSO), or getting their records at our Headquarters, we value each dollar budgeted to the department and judiciously channel these funds to help veterans "thrive in Illinois."



In our Veterans' Homes, care is delivered skillfully and compassionately. You can see this in relationships between veterans and the staff. They are family. This year, we were especially proud to open the new \$250 million Illinois Veterans' Home at Quincy, which is a showstopper. The buildings are magnificent in every sense, including state-of-the-art technology, private rooms, floor-to-ceiling windows, living rooms with fireplaces, and courtyards with interactive artwork.

As you will see in the Field Services report, our VSOs have been busy. The PACT Act exponentially elevated claims, and they were prepared to assist. Adjustments at the federal level instigated uncertainties, and the VSOs educated themselves to inform veterans with the most current and relevant information.

Our Women Veterans Program hosted the inaugural "25 women veterans in 2025" at Malcolm X College to honor 25 Illinois women veterans who have made a significant impact on their community. We also participated in the National Women Veterans Memorial Museum "drive for 500" campaign to document the career contribution of women veterans everywhere. We continue to offer programs for Gold Star Families throughout the year and ceremonies commemorating remembrance days.

In closing, it is a privilege to serve in this role and my honor to showcase the amazing work of Team IDVA who are out there every day, making a difference in the lives of Illinois veterans. We are here for you...always!

Sincerely,
Terry Prince
Director and U.S. Navy Veteran

Terry Prince

Director

Anthony Vaughn

Assistant Director

Jassen Strokosch

(as of October 2024)

Chief of Staff

Jennifer Franklin

Assistant to the Director

Asia Gentry

Deputy Chief of Staff

(as of June 2025)

Sara Augustinas

Legislative Liaison

Vacant

Human Resource Director

Hannah Bonecutter

Senior Policy Advisor

(as of May 2025)

Rex Crossland

Special Advisor to the Director

(January - February 2025)

Maureen S Hartigan

Communications Director

Brittany Hawkins

Chief Legal Counsel

Stephanie Heckenkamp

Chief Fiscal Officer

Franklin "Jay" Johnson

Equal Employment Officer

Franklin "Jay" Johnson

Labor Relations Administrator (Acting)

(through February 2025)

Shannon Clay

Director of Labor Relations

(as of May 2025)

Danielle N. Miller

Operations and Program Manager

Russell Needler

(as of September 2024)

Rex Crossland

(until September 2024)

Chief Internal Auditor

Cindy Reynolds

Senior Infection Preventionist

Shannon Shymansky

Grants Administrator

Margo Watson

Senior Program Manager

Women Veterans Coordinator

Dan Wellman

(retired October 2024 /90-day contract)

Melissa Cushman

Acting (as of June 2025)

Veterans Education and Training

Services (VETS) Administrator

Crystal Womack

Senior Program Policy Advisor

Robert Iverson III

Metro Region Supervisor

Claims Management Supervisor

Jeffrey Lewis

Southern Region Supervisor

Kimberly Yantis

Central Region Supervisor

Veterans' Homes

Angela Simmons

Senior Homes Administrator

Amy Keistler

Administrator Veteran's Home at

Anna

T'Kira Siler-Wilkerson

(through March 2025)

Jennifer Malone

Acting (as of April 2025)

Administrator Veteran's Home at

Chicago

Dena Robbins

Administrator Veteran's Home at

LaSalle

Tanya Huston-Smith

Administrator Veteran's Home at

Manteno

Charles Newton

Administrator Veteran's Home at

Quincy

Tanya Huston-Smith

Prince Home Program Administrator

Matthew McCormick

Veterans' Home

Construction Coordinator

Field Services

Mark Patterson

Field Services Manager

Ken Bonner

Field Training Coordinator

Melissa Beckford

Northern Region Supervisor

Field Services is divided into four regions: Metro, Northern, Central, Southern, and the Claims Management Center. The Field Services Manager oversees the activities related to claims and services provided by the four regional supervisors and the Claims Management Center supervisor. Case management is enhanced by the Claims Management Center, located at the VA's Regional Office (VARO) in Chicago.

Through its Field Services Division, IDVA provides a statewide system of Veteran Service Officers (VSOs) who serve local veterans and establish networks within the communities they serve. Veterans' needs for services provided by IDVA continue to be a priority, resulting from the Global War on Terrorism and the inherent physical and mental demands placed upon our service members. The addition of the USDVA PACT Act has greatly increased claims for the Claims Management Center. Additionally, job cuts at the USDVA and other federal policy changes have elevated veterans' concerns about claims processing, benefits, and services. VSOs are apprised of these changes and their impact on Illinois veterans. VSOs also continue to support the survivors and families of Illinois' fallen by assisting with filing claims and receiving services earned by veterans.

VSOs are accredited by the US Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA). They assist veterans and their dependents in filing claims for benefits with state and federal agencies. This assistance includes applications to the USDVA for compensation, pension, and increased disability benefits. Additionally, VSOs assist in applying for admission to the Illinois Veterans' Homes, state and federal education, burial benefits, and federal health benefits. IDVA's accredited Appeals VSOs coordinate directly with the USDVA's Veterans' Benefits Administration to present and represent claims, assist veterans in appealing decisions, and appear at hearings with the claimants before administrative law judges.



IDVA Central Office recognizes military children for their strength, resilience, and sacrifice by wearing purple on Purple Up Day, April 11, 2025. Purple is a blend of all the colors of the U.S. Military branches.

Field Services Division Summary of Activity for FY 2025

USDVA BENEFITS

Veterans Pension	160
Widows Pension	120
Veterans Comp	4,538
Widows DIC	474
Parents DIC	3
Appeals/Hearings	266/30
Hospital	566

In FY25, the Department's VSOs conducted **19,423** in-person and **44,864** telephonic interviews and prepared **17,862** state and federal applications for eligible Illinois veterans, dependents, and survivors. These services were instrumental in establishing new claims for increases in U.S. Veterans Affairs benefits for Illinois veterans, their dependents, and their survivors, securing **\$51,361,214** in initial and increases in benefits. This fiscal year, the Department's VSOs submitted **5,213** original claims requesting monetary benefits through the U.S. Veterans Affairs. The Department represented **27,683** new and continuing awards, which brought **\$617,451,645** into the state in FY25.

Service to veterans continues through outreach to the community by participating in local special events. The VSOs nearly doubled their attendance in FY25 to **311** from **175** in FY24. At these outreach events, emphasis is placed on making veterans and their family members aware of the services offered by the IDVA. Field Services hired **seven** Veteran Service Officers and **two** Field Staff in FY25.



*Field Services Leadership Team
Left to right: Southern Region Supervisor Jeffrey Lewis, Northern Region Supervisor Melissa Beckford, Field Services Manager Mark Patterson, Central Region Supervisor Kimberly Yantis, and Metro Region Supervisor Robert Iverson, at the War Museum at the Veterans' Home at Quincy.*



Metro Region: Veterans Chamber of Commerce Special Event at the Union League Club in Chicago. Frank Gutierrez, Board President of the Veterans Chamber of Commerce, Brandon Jagers, Veteran Service Officer (Chicago), and Sarita Connelly, Board Director of the Veterans Chamber of Commerce.



Northern Region: Veteran Service Officer Matthew Taylor (Machesney Park Armory and VA Clinic, Rockford/Winnebago County) presented at the DeKalb County Senior Fair about Illinois and federal benefits and services.



Central Region: Veteran Service Officer Alfredo Rocha represents IDVA at 2025 108th VFW Illinois VFW Convention.



Southern Region: Veterans and Gold Star Family Day at the DuQuoin State Fair. Veteran Service Officer Theresa Guyer Mt. Vernon/Jefferson County, Assistant Director Anthony Vaughn, Field Services Manager Mark Patterson, and Veteran Service Officer Chad Roach Carlinville/Macoupin County.

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs' Veterans Education and Training Section includes three veterans' education and training programs: one federally funded program and two state-funded programs. The federal program is the State Approving Agency, and the state programs are the Deceased, Disabled, and MIA/POW Veterans' Dependents Educational Opportunity Grant and the Deceased, Disabled, and MIA/POW Veterans' Dependents Scholarship.

STATE APPROVING AGENCY

The State Approving Agency (SAA) is a federally funded program established to approve and audit for compliance college and non-college degree programs, vocational flight training, apprenticeships, on-the-job training (OJT) programs, license and certification tests, license and certification exam prep courses, and Small Business Development Centers Entrepreneurship Courses, so that educational assistance benefits may be paid to veterans and other eligible persons under programs administered by the USDVA.

The following is a list of entitlement programs for which the SAA has approval and supervisory responsibilities within Illinois:

- Montgomery G.I. Bill – Active Duty (Chapter 30)
- Post-Vietnam Era Veterans' Educational Assistance Program (VEAP Chapter 32)
- Post 9/11 G.I. Bill – (Chapter 33)
- Survivors and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program (Chapter 35)
- Montgomery G.I. Bill – Selected Reserve (Chapter 1606)

In FY25, the SAA provided Illinois veterans with opportunities to train at **1,424** approved education and training facilities. These numbers include educational programs at **175** universities, colleges, and community colleges, **116** vocational schools, and **438** high schools for dependents using the Survivors and Dependents Education Assistance program. The State Approving Agency also approved **624** apprenticeship and on-the-job training facilities for veterans, military service members, and their families. **The SAA's efforts have resulted in Illinois leading the nation in active apprenticeship and OJT programs.**

During FY25, the SAA continued to provide education briefings at Naval Station Great Lakes and to National Guard soldiers demobilizing from activation. The SAA also continued to host quarterly regional town hall meetings at approved education and training facilities, as well as monthly roundtable discussions with veterans' coordinators at public universities, community colleges, and non-profit institutions.

PROGRAM APPROVALS AND CANCELLATIONS

- New, Revised, Other Institutions of Higher Learning Approval Actions: 9780
- Programs and Institutions of Higher Learning Withdrawn: 334
- New, Revised, Other Non-College Degree Program Actions: 5440
- Programs and Non-College Degree Programs Withdrawn: 178
- New, Revised, Other Apprenticeship Approval Actions: 235
- Programs and Apprenticeships Withdrawn: 10
- Programs and On-The-Job Training Approval Actions: 708
- Programs and On-The-Job Training Programs Withdrawn: 58
- New, Revised, Other Flight School Approval Actions: 16
- Programs and Flight School Programs Withdrawn: 0
- Programs and License and Certification Tests Approval Actions: 57
- Programs and License, and Certification Tests Withdrawn: 2
- Total Approval and Withdrawal Actions: 16,818

The Deceased, Disabled, and MIA/POW Veterans Dependent Scholarship

The Deceased, Disabled, and MIA/POW Veterans Dependent Scholarship covers tuition and certain fees to an Illinois public university or community college for eligible dependents. The scholarship will cover a maximum of 120 points, with points based on a semester-hour system. FY25 demonstrated significant growth in claims and distribution.

In **FY25**, there were **3,131** claims for a total of **\$16,146,801.72**. The summer of 2024 had **506** claims at **\$4,014,643.03**. While the Fall 2024 term saw **1341** claims at **\$6,166,738.40**, the Spring 2025 term resulted in **1,286** claims at **\$5,965,420.29**. Illinois public universities and community colleges graciously absorbed the remaining costs.

Summer 24	\$4,014,643.03	506
Fall 24	\$6,166,738.40	1341
Spring 25	\$5,965,420.29	1286
Total	\$16,146,801.70	3133

OTHER STATE VETERANS' EDUCATION BENEFIT PROGRAMS

The **Illinois Veterans' Grant (IVG)** Program pays tuition and mandatory fees at all Illinois state-supported colleges, universities, and community colleges for eligible Illinois veterans.

Applications and additional information are available from IDVA's VSO offices, college financial aid offices, or the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC), 1755 Lake Cook Road, Deerfield, 60015, telephone 847-948-8550 or 800-899-ISAC, www.isac.org.

The **University of Illinois Children of Veterans Scholarship** Each county in the state shall be entitled, annually, to one honorary scholarship at the University of Illinois, for the benefit of children of veterans of WWI, WWII, the Korean War, the Vietnam Conflict, and any time on or after August 2, 1990, and until those persons in service are no longer eligible for the Southwest Asia Service Medal.

Veterans Cash Grant

The Joint Special Instant Scratch-Off lottery ticket proceeds are shared with nine causes, including the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Cash Grant program, through a 7X's Bingo Multiplier scratch-off ticket. The ticket is sold year-round. Proceeds from the ticket sales are deposited into the Illinois Veterans Assistance Fund, an interest-bearing account in the State Treasury. Through the Veterans Cash Committee, the IDVA awards grants to governmental organizations and tax-exempt entities that apply for funding to address veterans' needs, including behavioral health, homelessness, health insurance costs, disability benefits, long-term care, employment and job training, and emergency financial assistance. Since February 2006, the Committee has authorized over **449** grants totaling over **\$24 million**. In FY25, the Veterans Cash division awarded **14** grants totaling **\$1,200,143.42**, with typical grant amounts ranging from \$25,000 to \$100,000 annually.

The Grant Committee, comprised of three voting members, meets quarterly to review and evaluate grant requests using a rubric. Based on their assessments, they make recommendations and forward them to the IDVA Director for final approval. The voting members of the Grant Committee for FY25 are Greg Padovani, Colonel Robert Tyler (IVAC), and Betsy Tolstedt, who also serves as the committee chairperson.



FY2025 Recipients of the Veterans Cash Grant

- A Safe Haven Foundation
- American Legion Department of Illinois
- BraveHearts Therapeutic Riding
- Brushwood Center at Ryerson Woods
- Central Illinois Veterans Commission
- Donka, Inc
- Freedom Paws
- Goodwill Industries of Central Illinois
- Veterans New Beginnings Illinois, Inc.
- Impacting Veterans Lives, Inc.
- Legal Aid Chicago
- Merging Vets and Players
- The Chicago Lighthouse,
- Transitional Living Services

Summary of Activity for FY 2025

GRANTS MADE BY CATEGORY	NUMBER OF GRANTS	TOTAL AMOUNT
Behavioral Health.....	5	\$429,250.02
Veteran Disability Benefit.....	2	\$200,000
Health Insurance Costs.....	0	\$0
Veteran Long-Term Care.....	0	\$0
Veteran Employment & Employment Training.....	3	\$246,183.40
Veteran Homelessness.....	4	\$324,710.00
Veteran Emergency Funding.....	0	\$0
TOTAL.....	14	\$1,200,143

Legislative Division

The Legislative Division works with the Governor's legislative office, elected officials, House and Senate staff, and is responsible for identifying agency needs that can be met through legislation. The division's Legislative Director and Legislative Liaison track and monitor legislation that could affect the agency, participate in legislative negotiations and stakeholder meetings, and handle constituent casework. The division regularly travels to Springfield to be present for committees and testify as needed.

In FY25, IDVA supported three legislative initiatives: HB 2547 (Swanson/Arellano), HB 2572 (Schweiser/Faraci), and SB 2175 (Porfirio/Kifowit).

- **HB 2547 (Swanson/Arellano):** HB 2547 amended various Acts across the Illinois Compiled Statutes (ILCS) to remove the apostrophe in every reference to "the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs." The purpose of this bill was to finalize IDVA's rebranding project, which included the creation of a new logo and a modification to the agency's name.
- **HB 2572 (Schweiser/Faraci):** HB 2572 provided that the IDVA shall determine the eligibility of persons who apply for a Deceased, Disabled, and MIA/POW Veterans' Dependents Scholarship (a post-secondary education program) or a Deceased, Disabled, and MIA/POW Veterans' Dependents Educational Opportunity Grant Act by rule.
- **SB 2175 (Porfirio/Kifowit):** Under current law, State of Illinois (SOI) employees who are veterans are permitted four days per year to attend medical appointments for the treatment or examination of a military service-connected condition. This is in addition to standard sick leave. Under current law, these days can only be used when attending appointments at a VA hospital or clinic. SB 2175 changed the law so that the days to be used at "any type of health care provider or health care facility", as some veterans are authorized to receive their care from non-VA providers in the community (Community Care).

In addition to drafting and following the progress of its initiatives, the division monitored legislation related to agency needs and operations. In FY25, the division tracked up to 88 bills that could affect the agency directly or indirectly. Many of these bills did not make it through the entire legislative process. By the end of the legislative session, only 20 of these bills had passed out of both chambers.

Of the **22** bills, the breakdown was:

- **8** bills focused on the military, veterans and/or their families
- **4** bills focused on long-term care
- **6** bills focused on agency operations and labor
- **2** bills focused on the budget

Finally, in FY 2025, the division closed 189 constituent cases coming from the Governor's Office of Constituent Affairs (GOCA), district staff, and legislators.





U.S. Senator Duckworth, Governor Pritzker, and Juliana Stratton Visit the Veterans' Home at Chicago

U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth, Governor JB Pritzker, and Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton toured the Veterans' Home at Chicago, visited with residents, and met with the Home Administrator, staff, and IDVA leadership. At a roundtable, leadership provided an update, and ideas were shared on how the state and federal governments can continue to support caring for Illinois veterans. The home was conceptualized while Senator Duckworth was the Director of the IDVA, and Governor Pritzker ensured its completion and opening in January 2022. The \$131M project reflects Illinois' investment in veterans and their care.

Administrator T'Kira Siler-Wilkerson, Assistant Director Anthony Vaughn, Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton, Governor JB Pritzker, and U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth meet with residents.

Illinois Veterans' Home at Quincy

On Thursday, June 26, 2025, four legislators and three legislative staffers visited the Illinois Veterans' Home at Quincy's skilled care building. During the visit, legislators toured the new facility, met with residents and staff, and spoke with IDVA Director Terry Prince about the agency and how it serves the 550,000 Illinois veterans.



Left to right: Veterans' Home at Quincy Administrator Chuck Newton, Chief of Staff Jassen Strokosch, State Representative Kyle Moore, State Representative Dan Swanson, State Representative C.D. Davidsmeyer, State Representative Stephanie Kifowit, Director Terry Prince, Kelly May, and Regina Gaus.

Office of Labor Relations

The Office of Labor Relations (OLR) provides leadership, guidance, and oversight for all matters related to collective bargaining agreements, employee discipline, and labor-management relations. OLR ensures that the disciplinary process is applied consistently, fairly, and in accordance with contractual requirements, while also supporting supervisors and managers in addressing employee accountability. In addition to overseeing the agency's corrective action process, the office guides temporary and interim assignments, vendor contracts, and all matters that pertain to union contracts to ensure compliance with agency policy and collective bargaining agreements. OLR also plays a central role in grievance administration. The office provides oversight and support for grievances at all levels and serves as the agency's representative at third-level grievances. Staff coordinate closely with supervisors, managers, and CMS to investigate, prepare, and present grievance responses, ensuring consistent application of contract language across the agency.

Beyond grievance handling, OLR represents the agency in contract negotiations, impact bargaining, supplemental agreements, and the negotiation of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs). The office works in partnership with CMS and legal counsel to ensure that all agreements are consistent with contract provisions and state-wide policy, while balancing the operational needs of the agency with the rights of employees.

Equally important, OLR serves as the primary liaison between management, CMS, labor unions, and other stakeholders on all labor relations matters. This includes facilitating communication with union representatives, addressing workplace issues, and supporting labor-management cooperation. To strengthen management capacity, OLR provides training and consultation to supervisors and managers on labor relations topics such as discipline, grievance handling, and contract interpretation.

The guiding principles of the office are consistency, fairness, timeliness, and support. By applying these principles, OLR helps maintain a productive and respectful workplace while ensuring that all labor relations activities align with contractual obligations and statewide policies.

The Department of Innovation and Technology (DoIT)

The Department of Innovation and Technology (DOIT) is responsible for managing and supporting technological innovation of the Department, improving veterans' services with technology, equipment, and the secure storage of digital data for the systems deployed for IDVA staff usage. The IT Division is comprised of employees from the DoIT, which maintains the State of Illinois data centers, where all IDVA data is securely stored and safeguarded, and is the central hub for supporting all digital technologies employed at our Veterans' Homes, Springfield and Chicago offices, and the Field offices. This includes, but is not limited to, the complete wired and wireless network infrastructure, equipment, and IT support.

The Equal Employment Officer/ADA Coordinator (EEO)

The Equal Employment Officer/ADA Coordinator (EEO) is committed to instilling an environment free of discrimination and promoting a collaborative and supportive work community, ensuring that the agency abides by Equal Employment Opportunities and the Americans with Disabilities Act and creates an environment free from discrimination. The EEO establishes the goals and objectives of the program and develops strategic plans for achieving those goals. The EEO is responsible for all state and federal reporting and compliance, and managing sensitive situations and information. The EEO develops and implements a comprehensive Affirmative Action Plan for IDVA and conducts EEO/AA, ADA, and Sexual Harassment training for management and supervisory staff. The EEO monitors Agency activities for reasonable accommodations and the prohibition of discriminatory systems and practices, monitors and evaluates program operations, and implements modifications. Reports and complaints of discrimination or harassment are evaluated, and action plans are developed through the EEO's direction.

The Human Resources Division

The Human Resources (HR) Division is responsible for the employees of the Agency, including talent acquisition, compensation and benefits, time and attendance, training and development, workers' compensation, and unemployment claims. This unit oversees personnel operations at the five Veterans' Homes through their Human Resources Offices. Each HR Office works with the Veterans' Home management team to develop long-term strategies for the growth and development of the Agency. The HR staff also provides essential Agency information and policy guidance. HR has diligently sought creative ways to recruit and retain talent to care for our veterans, including on-site job fairs.

★ Serve those who served ★		
Join IDVA for a series of virtual job fairs to learn more about becoming part of Team IDVA		
Date	Time	Event Registration
9/2/2025	2:00-2:45 P.M.	IDVA Extraordinary Employees
9/4/2025	1:00-1:45 P.M.	How to Read a Job Bulletin
9/5/2025	10:00-10:45 A.M.	Interview Tips and Tricks
9/8/2025	5:30-6:15 P.M.	Creating a Profile
9/10/2025	9:30-10:15 A.M.	How to Certify Your Veterans Points
9/12/2025	10:00-10:45 A.M.	IDVA Extraordinary Employees
9/15/2025	12:00-12:45 P.M.	Interview Tips and Tricks
9/17/2025	2:00-2:45 P.M.	How to Certify Your Veterans Points
9/22/2025	9:30-10:15 A.M.	Creating a Profile
9/25/2025	5:30-6:15 P.M.	How to Read a Job Bulletin

IDVA ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF
VETERANS AFFAIRS

IDVA Human Resources Offers Online Job Skills Seminars

As part of its aggressive recruiting and hiring campaign, IDVA's Human Resources Department developed a series of online seminars to educate individuals about employment opportunities available at IDVA, its culture, and mission. Additionally, participants may register for seminars on resume writing, interview skills, and other essential strategies for securing employment successfully. Registration is easy through the QR codes provided. Since the courses went live in December 2024, 72 virtual events have been offered, with over 240 job seekers participating. This is a sample of the seminars offered throughout the year.



Candice Rudd, IDVA HR & Recruitment Specialist, recruits at the Kennedy-King College Spring 2025 Networking & Career Fair.

The Legal Division

The Legal Division serves as the Legal Counsel for the Department. The Chief Legal Counsel reports directly to the agency Director and the Governor's Office of the General Counsel. The Legal Division staff interprets laws and regulations; provides legal advice and counsel to senior Department staff on agency investigations and employment issues; coordinates and prepares matters for litigation or administrative hearings; provides legal advice and assistance to the EEO Office; provides assistance and review of contractual and procurement matters; reviews administrative rules or proposed legislation for legislative consideration; and provides assistance with reviewing/drafting agency policies. In addition, the Deputy General Counsel serves as the Department's Ethics Officer and the Freedom of Information Act Officer. The Assistant General Counsels and Paralegals support the day-to-day operations and routine legal work product required of the Department. The Legal Division and Chief Legal Counsel welcome questions or concerns from IDVA staff, valued partners, and members of the public.

The Senior Policy Advisory (position initiated in May 2025)

The Senior Policy Advisor (advisor) oversees the operations and activities mandated by legislation, rules, regulations, and/or law, and analyzes current policies impacting the Department's management and operations. The advisor collaborates across all departments to formulate and implement policy and management improvements impacting culture and operations. The advisor confers with executive leadership regarding recommended policies and the status of implemented policies.

The advisor drives stakeholder outreach, working with Veteran-centered organizations and initiatives. The advisor also assists with legislative affairs while ensuring compliance with recent legislative audits. Furthermore, the advisor monitors the implementation of policy procedures and tracks outcomes of executed policies.

The Veterans' Home Construction Coordinator

The Veterans' Home Construction Coordinator conducts long-range planning for future capital projects to meet the care needs of residents of the Illinois Veterans' Homes. The coordinator preserves the State's facilities and capital assets and serves as liaison with the Capital Development Board (CDB), IDPH, the Health Facilities and Services Review Board, and the USDVA for capital improvement projects. This year, construction projects included the completion of the \$300 million Quincy Veterans' Home project and several renovation and expansion projects at the Anna, LaSalle, and Manteno Veterans' Homes.

The Operations and Programs Division

The Operations and Programs Division has two major areas of responsibility to support the Agency. The operations staff consists of the Supply & Services and the Records Sections. Supplies and Services work with all other divisions in ordering and distributing supplies and printed materials, including forms, booklets, newsletters, brochures, posters, banners, etc., and, if necessary, coordinates external printing requirements.

This section is responsible for managing the Central Office automobile fleet and processing the 4,958 pieces of incoming and outgoing correspondence in FY25. Supplies & Services assisted with multiple special printing projects for Central Office and Field Services.

The Operations and Programs Division also manages the Records Department, which handles requests for discharge records for veterans, service verification from authorized third parties (Funeral Homes, VACs, USDVA, and parties authorized by the veteran), and Veteran Service Office requests for non-automated records in the Central Office. This section continuously scans veteran records obtained through the years that predate automated capabilities. This division houses more than 1.9 million veterans' records dating from the Civil War Era to the present and is responsible for recording discharges and maintaining a Roll of Honor of deceased veterans in Illinois. To further enhance the department's ability to store and utilize these records, an ongoing project to convert these documents into electronic format is underway; to date, **6,568,797 military documents** have been added to the electronic database.

The Programs Division handles state grants/benefits based on the veteran's service or disability criteria and survivorship based on Illinois veteran status. The programs based on the veterans' war-time participation are, War Compensation (Bonuses for WWII, Korean, Vietnam, Desert Storm, and Global War on Terrorism); benefits based on Survivors' Compensation to a spouse or qualifying dependent; The programs based on service-connected disability criteria are; specially Adapted Housing Grant and Disabled Veterans Property Tax Relief; the programs based on Veteran Status are War Veterans Grave Registration, Cartage and Erection of Headstone, Marker, or Memorial Marker (USDVA Marker Reimbursement), Military Plate Eligibility Verification for Secretary of State, and Welcome Home Letters, which identifies benefits and directs Veterans returning to Illinois to the source or assistance to pursue the benefits. The Programs Division paid over **\$337,000 in state benefits** to veterans across the state of Illinois in FY25.



The Infection Preventionist (IP)

The Infection Preventionist (IP) plans, directs, and develops a department-wide infectious disease prevention program, which includes the program's total management process, including formulation and implementation of the program, and organization and implementation of program goals and objectives. This helps ensure the safety of the residents and staff. IP visits the homes at least quarterly and as needed, should a possible infection-related concern arise. The IP trains infection preventionist nurses and staff at each Home and identifies opportunities for infection prevention based on observations, process and outcome indicators, and other findings. The IP develops and leads the process for improvement and provides day-to-day consultation on infection control problems, isolation, communicable diseases, hospital products, and procedures. The IP develops and implements its policies and procedures based on currently accepted infection prevention and control best practices and keeps current on IDPH and CDC Infection Control rules and regulations.

Communications

The Communications Director creates and produces internal and external communications for the agency, including printed literature, social media, the IDVA website, electronic newsletters, presentations, Public Service Announcements, video messages, and speeches. The Communications Director publishes the Agency's annual report in compliance with a legislative mandate. Other responsibilities include:

Managing the integrity of the IDVA brand by ensuring that the logo is used consistently across the agency, including internal communications (email signature/letterhead/business cards), printed materials, printed branded "giveaway" items, and signage.

Managing media relations, including drafting and disseminating media advisories, press releases, statements, letters to the editor, and public service announcements. All media inquiries are fielded by the Communications Director, who researches and creates messaging and statements.

Updating the IDVA's website to ensure veterans have access to the most current information on a user-friendly platform. <https://veterans.illinois.gov/>

Writing and editing the Veterans Connections newsletter, which is sent to more than 25,000 veterans via email, the IDVA community, IDVA veteran service partners, and social media. It can be found on the IDVA website.

Managing the Agency's Social Media platforms by creating posts and content to share with veterans regarding benefits, events, programs, and remembrance days.

- Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/IllinoisDepartmentOfVeteransAffairs>
- Women Veterans Facebook Page <https://www.facebook.com/IllinoisWomenVeterans/>
(note: The Women Veterans Coordinator is responsible for this page.)
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/il-idva/>

Writing Speeches, statements, scripts, and internal messages delivered by the Agency's Director.

Editor and publisher of the Annual Report.

Supporting the Homes, Field Services, Human Resources, and Fiscal Communications needs for events, hiring fairs, remarks, and presentations.

In FY25, IDVA disseminated the following:

- **16** press releases, advisories, and statements
- **224** Social media posts - FB and LinkedIn
- **12** VC newsletter distribution (Constant Contact, FB, LinkedIn, VSO partners, and internal)
- **5** Video messages (social and PSAs)
- **5** Radio PSAs
- Onboarding Video
- Annual Report

In August 2024, Navy Week was celebrated in Chicago, where Sailors participated in events across Chicago, including three at the Veterans' Home at Chicago. A Vietnam War Commemoration honored 33 Vietnam Veterans residing at the Home in a special pinning ceremony where U.S. Navy Commander Brian Wierzbicki, Chief of Public Engagement at The United States of America Vietnam War Commemoration, and Sailors honored the veterans. Sailors also hosted a Cubs game watch and a beautification project where they painted benches for the Home's courtyards, representing military branches. The week culminated with a ceremony at Navy Pier where Governor JB Pritzker presented a Navy Week proclamation.



Sailors present U.S. Navy veterans with a Vietnam War pin as part of the Vietnam War Commemoration Ceremony.



Navy Pier Chief Executive Officer Marilynn Gardner, U.S. Navy Vice Admiral Douglas Gordon Perry, IDVA Director Terry Prince, and Governor JB Pritzker on Navy Pier, where the Governor proclaimed August 9, 2024, as Navy Day.

IDVA offers veterans and their families a variety of programs and events to foster connections and build strong communities. IDVA also executes programs and events for Illinois' Gold Star Families. Throughout the year, IDVA recognizes momentous military remembrance days through events, ceremonies, and social media. These programs and events are managed by the Senior Programs Manager, who administers each program and/or gathering. They also coordinate the Illinois Veterans Advisory Council.

Gold Star Families Programs

IDVA invites Gold Star families to events honoring their heroes and offers spaces for the community to be together. Their loved ones made the ultimate sacrifice in serving our nation, and these gestures demonstrate that we stand by them. The Springfield and DuQuoin State Fairs' Veterans Days, Gold Star Families Weekend, and the Gold Star Christmas Tree Lighting are the primary events offered throughout the year.

Gold Star Families Weekend

Gold Star Families Day is held the last weekend in September and culminates with the Yellow Rose Ceremony on National Gold Star Mother's Day. In FY25, the families gathered in Bloomington for two days of programs, events, and gatherings. The families shared stories and honored their hero through tears and laughter.



Gold Star Families gather at Gold Star Families Weekend in Bloomington.



Gold Star Families participate in the Christmas Tree Lighting.

Gold Star Christmas Tree Lighting

The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum (ALPLM) displayed Illinois' Gold Star Family Christmas Tree. The tree was lit following a program featuring IDVA Director Terry Prince and Major General Rodney Boyd, Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard. The tree was decorated by Gold Star Families with personalized ornaments commemorating each Illinois hero who lost their life in combat. The tree is a space to reflect on and remember their sacrifice and commitment to our nation's freedoms. The tree was on display throughout the holiday season for visitors to view.

Desert Storm Remembrance Program

February 28, 2025, marked the 34th anniversary of the end of the Persian Gulf War. On April 11, 1991, less than 90 days after the U.S.-led offensive against Iraq, Operation Desert Storm began. The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs commemorated the anniversary of Operation Desert Storm Cease-Fire at the Illinois State Museum in Springfield.

Col Michael Barton, IL Army National Guard, and IDVA Director Terry Prince present Governor JB Pritzker's proclamation declaring February 28th, 2025, Desert Storm Cease Fire Day.



Veterans Day at the Springfield and DuQuoin State Fairs

Veterans Day at the state fairs is an annual tradition that honors veterans, their families, and Gold Star families. In 2024, hundreds of veterans and their families joined for a full day of programs and events. Gold Star Families and their heroes were honored at Gold Star Family Celebrations of Life. The main program highlighted the theme, "250-Year Anniversaries of the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps." Lunch was offered to veterans and their families, and veterans enjoyed a day of fellowship.

Springfield State Fair Main Program: United States Navy Veteran Robert Dale Sinclair, who served in the Korean War, honors his branch during the playing of Anchors Aweigh. His daughter Cindy Sinclair proudly looks on.



Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs and the Elk Lodge 158 commemorated the 83rd anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor with a program featuring the symbolic wreath-laying ceremony by the Sons and Daughters of Pearl Harbor Survivors.

Springfield Veterans Day Parade

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, the Interveterans Council of Sangamon County, the County Interveterans Burial Detail of Sangamon County, and the Hayes-Krell Military Order of the Purple Heart hosted the annual Springfield Veterans Day parade. IDVA staff represent IDVA by participating in the parade.



Operation Rising Spirit/Operation Camaraderie

Throughout the holiday season, IDVA encourages and recruits volunteers to its five Veterans' Homes in Anna, Chicago, LaSalle, Manteno, and Quincy. Volunteers provide opportunities for veterans, including events, programs, parties, games, outings, and visits. Volunteers are central to the vibrancy of the community.

Veterans' Home at Manteno: Volunteers Janis Cadieux and Sandy Britt are enjoying musical entertainment and dancing with U.S. Army veteran LeRoy Schweitzer.

Pink Out Day

In honor of the millions of women who have been diagnosed with breast cancer, IDVA staff participated in a department-wide "Pink Out Day" to show support for the women who have or are actively battling breast cancer and the survivors.



Team Veterans' Home at Chicago wears their pink well!

Purple Up Day: In Honor of Military Children

Each year, IDVA shows its support of military children by wearing purple on Purple Up Day.

The Chicago Central Office shows its support of military children and their sacrifices, resilience, and service. Left to right: Dylan Hopp, Sara Augustinas, Maureen Hartigan, Matt Eddington, Candice Rudd, Robin Webster, Cythina McKee, and Terry Prince.



Women Veterans Program

The Women Veterans Program advocates for Women Veterans for compensation, rehabilitation, outreach healthcare, and other issues Women Veterans face in the community. In this role, the Senior Program Manager for the Women Veterans Program determines policy, program objectives, program standards, service output, and program services. Through community engagement, the Women Veterans Coordinator partners with local, state, national, and federal organizations to establish a full-bodied outreach program to address the needs of Women Veterans and develop networks for support.

25 Women Veteran Leaders in 2025

In honor of Women Veterans Recognition Month, IDVA and the Jesse Brown VA Women's Health Program hosted the 25 Illinois Women Veteran Leaders of 2025. The award was presented to 25 outstanding Illinois Women Veterans in recognition of their exceptional leadership and community service across the state of Illinois. The event aimed to celebrate and highlight the invaluable contributions of Illinois Women Veterans, fostering a sense of pride and unity within the state. It also provided an important platform for Women Veterans to meet, network, and connect with one another, creating lasting relationships with other female leaders throughout Illinois. The ceremony underscores the commitment of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs Women Veterans Program to both their communities and the state, reinforcing the strong bond among these leaders. For more information on this supportive community, visit: <https://veterans.illinois.gov/programs/women.html>



The 25 Women Veterans Leaders of 2025 were presented with an engraved award recognizing their contributions to the women veteran community.



25 Women Veteran Leaders in 2025: First Row: Karen Hernandez, Jill Henry, Amanda Depew, Lisa Mannion, Rosemary E. Connolly, Renee Dickerson, Milana Herman, Denisse Montoya, Alejandra Hernandez, Evamarie Duff, Treazure Owens, Kimberly Yantis, Angela St. Paul, Margo Watson; Second Row: Laura Doss, IDVA Director Terry Prince, Cassandra Taylor, Yvette Jones-Swanson, Tyra Oliver, Representative Stephanie Kifowit, Nekohl Johnson, Vernessa L. Henderson. Not pictured: Tamala Anderson, Ashtin Bader, Senator Tammy Duckworth, Elisabeth Pennix, Elizabeth D. Soto, Ashley Tuburan, Angela Walker.

National Women Veterans United, Illinois Women Veterans Day

On June 12, 2025, the National Women Veterans United (NWWU) hosted a special event honoring the service and contributions of women veterans at the SGT Simone A. Robinson Center, located in Chicago. The event brought together veterans, community members, and supporters to recognize the dedication and sacrifices of women in the armed forces.

Margo Watson, Women Veterans Coordinator, Senior Project Manager, with the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs, served as the keynote speaker, delivering a powerful message that celebrated the strength, resilience, and continued leadership of women veterans in both military and civilian life.



Veteran Suicide Prevention

Governor's Challenge: The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs is dedicated to statewide efforts to end veteran suicide and is a proud partner of the Illinois Governor's Challenge, a campaign to prevent suicide among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF). The Governor's Challenge is encouraging people from across the state to become part of this crusade to prevent suicide among SMVF.

Over the year, it created messaging disseminated through press releases, PSAs, social media, and events. The three-pronged approach includes:

- Hear the call: look for warning signs of crisis
- Spread the word: share relevant information
- Increase safety by all means: reduce access to lethal means

IDVA has helped develop messaging and external communications, including PSAs, social media, news releases, and events. Director Prince has been directly involved in the strategy and delivery of messages.

The Governor's Challenge also offers a training portal for people to be trained in suicide prevention. Its ambitious goal is to train 70,000 medical professionals, including hospital staff, primary care physicians, police, fire, EMTs, and correctional officers, state and local Veteran Service Organizations, social workers and therapists, workplace leaders, school principals, teachers and counselors, faith leaders, and others interested in joining this effort. The Governor's Challenge enlisted experts to lead the training and provide concrete solutions and approaches. The Governor's Challenge is a partnership between the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to bring the Governor's and Mayor's Challenges to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families to states and communities across the Nation.



Homelessness

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs participated in the Interagency Task Force with the Illinois Office to Prevent and End Homelessness in Illinois. The key purpose of the Task Force is to coordinate strategy, effort, and impact in programs for persons experiencing homelessness and housing instabilities. In partnership with the Illinois Office to Prevent and End Homelessness, IDVA has developed agency-specific commitments dedicated to preventing Veteran homelessness.

Illinois 100-Day Challenges to End Veteran Homelessness

IDVA participated in the 100-Day Challenge launch, held in Bloomington, May 5-6, 2025, hosted and facilitated by Reinstitute, and served as a pivotal planning event focused on advancing efforts to prevent and end homelessness among Veterans. This initiative engaged multiple counties—namely Sangamon (Springfield), Whiteside, and DuPage—which concurrently undertook challenges to foster greater collaboration among local Continuums of Care (CoCs) and community partners. The event brought together a broad coalition of stakeholders, including Veterans Assistance Commissions (VAC), the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Salvation Army, the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA), the Supportive Housing Providers Association (SHPA), and other county-level community organizations. Participants convened to evaluate and enhance existing policies, practices, and workflows to identify innovative, coordinated strategies to effectively address and ultimately end Veteran homelessness. On the second day of the conference, teams established clear goals by identifying target populations—such as chronically homeless Veterans, new cases, and Veteran families—and setting specific numerical objectives for each category. This structured approach underscored the commitment to measurable outcomes and data-driven solutions. Overall, the event exemplified IDVA's steadfast dedication to leveraging community partnerships and evidence-based practices to improve housing stability and quality of life for Illinois Veterans.



K9 for Veterans Service Award

K9 for Veterans Service Award IDVA Director Prince was awarded the K9 for Veterans Service Award on behalf of Illinois veterans. IDVA and K9s for Veterans have a strong partnership, especially dedicated to eliminating veteran suicide. K9s for Veterans created the Forgotten Warrior Memorial in Channahon State Park, which honors those who have lost the battle against PTSD to suicide. For more information on K9 for Veterans, visit: [K9S FOR VETERANS - About K9s for Veterans](#)

K9s for Veterans Director Ken Avery, Director Terry Prince, and K9s for Veterans CEO Mike Tellerino

General Information

Each Illinois Veterans' Home is staffed with caring and dedicated professionals who provide quality long-term care and services to each resident. The Anna and Quincy Homes also offer domiciliary care. The Homes ensure that each resident experiences the highest possible quality of life with health care, activities, programs, and outings. Additionally, the Homes are supported by dedicated volunteers from the local communities and veterans' organizations who provide many additional supporting services and activities, which enhance the lives of veterans tremendously. Each Home is unique in its setting and united in its commitment to caring for the whole person.

DVA's Senior Home Administrator Angela Simmons Named President of the Illinois Nursing Home Administrators Association (INHAA)

Angela Simmons, IDVA's Senior Home Administrator, was named president of the Illinois Nursing Home Administrators Association (INHAA) after serving on its board since 2020. The INHAA represents and provides education, training, and support to medical professionals in the long-term care industry. As president of the Board of Directors, she will lead the board in advancing its members, nursing directors, and staff. Angela has been with IDVA since 2013, beginning as the Anna Home Administrator. In 2021, she became the Senior Home Administrator overseeing IDVA's five skilled residential homes in Anna, Chicago, LaSalle, Manteno, and Quincy. Angela believes in resident-centered care, and in 2015, she was named the Illinois Pioneering Culture Change Champion of the Year. She also serves on the Illinois Commission on LGBTQ Aging and the Healthcare Subcommittee for the Older Adult Services Advisory Committee. Angela is dedicated to changing the culture of long-term care into a homelike, "think outside the box" environment. Angie was raised in Southern Illinois and is the proud daughter of a Vietnam veteran. She is committed to service in the community and volunteers much of her time supporting the Special Olympics.

The NASVH Conference provides an exceptional opportunity to explore current trends, share best practices, and engage in dynamic discussions that shape the future of the state veterans' home programs. Additionally, "Capitol Hill Day" allowed Angie to meet with federal legislators to discuss important initiatives related to enhancing quality care services provided in state veterans homes.

NASVH's primary mission is to promote and enhance the quality of care and life of Veterans and families in the State Veterans homes through education, networking, and advocacy.



U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth and Senior Home Administrator Angela Simmons. Angie attended the National Association of State Veterans Homes (NASVH) in Washington, DC for its 2025 Winter Conference.



VETERANS' HOME AT ANNA

The Illinois Veterans' Home at Anna is a 50-bed, skilled care nursing facility with six domiciliary apartments. Situated on 16 acres in Union County, the Home provides long-term skilled nursing care and rehabilitative and social services. The residents enjoy the serenity and peacefulness of a sensory garden designed specifically for residents with Alzheimer's and related dementia, a pond, and beautiful surroundings.

The Home has completed a nearly \$3 million renovation project. The project included replacing HVAC units on the rooftop and in residents' rooms, windows in the residents' rooms, doors, and lighting. It also includes converting the bathing areas into a spa-like atmosphere with spa tubs and special lighting, and renovating the public restroom. These renovations elevated the residents' daily comfort, and the new windows and doors brightened bedrooms and living spaces. This project reflects the state's commitment to investing in the five Veterans' Homes across the state to ensure residents live in well-maintained and modern homes.



United States Navy Veteran, Andrew Warner, recognizes Memorial Day.

VETERANS' HOME AT CHICAGO



The Illinois Veterans Home at Chicago is a 200-private room and bath home for veterans seeking skilled residential care, including accommodations for those requiring memory care support. Its open floor plan creates a community around pods of living and dining spaces. The \$121 million Home was funded by Rebuild Illinois.

The Home offers a library, a barber shop, a bank, and a rehabilitation center. Housekeeping, laundry, and dietary services ensure the residents' day-to-day personal needs are met. Outdoor areas include a lushly planted garden with a walking path, benches, and a garden terrace. The multi-purpose room is the gathering place for events and family occasions.

Local artist Indira Johnson created custom, interactive artwork for every floor, themed "Helping Hands," to reflect the commitment of each medical professional and staff caring for their resident veterans.

An IDVA Veteran Service Officer is available on-site to assist veterans with questions regarding state and federal benefits.



U.S. Army veteran John Ridenour and U.S. Navy veteran Steve Dyer shoot some pool during the Home's Summer Mocktail Party.



VETERANS' HOME AT LASALLE

The Illinois Veterans' Home at LaSalle is a 190-bed facility providing skilled, recreational, rehabilitative, therapy, social services, and pastoral care since 1990. The home offers a bank, a barber shop, and a library. Gracious outdoor spaces include a commemorative peace garden with a walking path lined with memorial bricks and benches, a garden terrace, and picnic areas. Of its 200-person dedicated staff, 35 percent have been loyally

serving for over ten years. In FY24, the home underwent an \$8 million renovation project, including renovating the dining rooms, TV rooms, bathrooms, nurses' stations, and central administration spaces. Improvements include refinished walls, ceilings, floors, lighting fixtures, and heating/cooling systems.



U.S. Army's 250th Birthday on June 14, 2025: Randy Schueler, Raymond Null, Richard Mathias, Thomas Gianfranco, Edward Giomi, Stephen Maas, William Eisenberg, Arvin Bailey, James Jones, Malcolm Brooks, Chuck Geiger, Tunney Sebastian, John Soberri, Stephen Moore, James Crawford, George Reutner, Fred Leone, James Allen, Owen Liable, Joseph Posevina, Leland Musser, Richard Rivara, Raymond Hughes, Richard Osmund, Walter Garriott, Donald Brenner, Glenn Glover, Henry Piscia, Chester Gapski, Susan Milton, Joel Carter, Frank Montez, Robert Cipalo, and John Kochis.



The Veterans' Home at LaSalle unveiled a Vietnam Veterans Memorial in its Peace Garden, accompanied by a motorcycle drive-by of local veterans.



Veterans' Home at Manteno

The Illinois Veterans' Home at Manteno has welcomed veterans since 1986, serving many northern and central Illinois veterans. It is located 60 miles from Chicago and sits on a 122-acre campus. The Home provides a comfortable residence for up to 294 veterans, in a peaceful rural setting, and has a post office, library, bank, and beauty/barber shop. The campus features a 1 ½-acre man-made pond, stocked and landscaped, with a pavilion where veterans can enjoy the outdoors and "catch-and-release" fishing.

Activity Professionals Week

January 19th-25th was Activity Professionals Week. IDVA's Veterans' Homes in Anna, Chicago, LaSalle, Manteno, and Quincy are fortunate to have their activities teams that create a vibrant community for our state's heroes through creativity, energy, and dedication. Evidence shows that mental, physical, and emotional stimulation are the foundation for the overall well-being of residents in long-term homes. Conversation, companionship, and engagement enhance their overall quality of life. Activity professionals provide these key components and elevate the individual and the entire community. We thank each of our activity professionals for enriching the daily lives of our residents with meaningful activities and programs. They are an integral part of IDVA's approach to caring for all the needs of veterans in our care.



Veterans' Home at LaSalle: Christmas Photo (left to right) – SANTA is Jerry Bacidore (APA II), Shantel Soldati (APA II), Lori Patrick (APA II), Bailie Bongartz (Director of Volunteer Services), Taylor Schott (APA II), Kassie Seaborn (APA II), Mary McDermott (APA II)

Veteran Nursing Assistant Certified Week

June 12th-18th: Throughout Certified Nursing Assistants Week, or at IDVA, "Veteran Nursing Assistant Certified (VNAC) Week, we celebrated our frontline caregivers. They provide compassionate care to veterans in our five skilled residential Veterans' Homes. As a major part of the IDVA care team, we rely on them to ensure that we exceed the expectations of the veterans entrusted to our care. From their daily interactions, they may be the first to notice any physical or emotional changes, while working alongside the nurses and physicians to address these concerns. We know that many of our veterans and their families become a major part of their lives. They become a family that relies on them for their well-being, including their daily care, a friendly voice, and social interaction. This year's theme is "We are the Champions", and indeed, they are most definitely our champions. Thank you for choosing to serve those who served. We are grateful. Enjoy these photos of our amazing teams.



Veterans' Home at Manteno: Laura Torres, Maggie Shankland, Tavasie Terrell, and Jennifer Corbett



VETERANS' HOME AT QUINCY

In 1885, the 34th Illinois General Assembly passed legislation establishing a Soldiers' and Sailors' Home for Illinois veterans, with disabilities of the Mexican and Civil Wars, and selected Quincy as its site. In June 1973, the name was changed to the Illinois Veterans' Home at Quincy.

Today, more than 280 residents reside in skilled nursing and domiciliary care on its expansive 220-acre campus. Residents have access to a full complement of medical staff, a hydraulic, heated pool, a full-service therapy team, a restaurant, a bank, a post office,

chapels, a historical museum, commemorative memorials, and a self-sufficient library. A two-acre deer park is home to 30 deer, and two buffalo reside on the premises, frequently visited by the residents. An All-Wars Museum displays thousands of historical military items, and war memorials and markers are placed throughout the campus as symbols of those who have served.

In FY25, the Home continued construction of a new domiciliary and long-term care home (both opening in the fall of 2025/FY26), a \$300 million construction project, and an investment in Illinois veterans. The long-term care facility provides 210 private rooms and baths and includes dining rooms, gathering spaces, outdoor courtyards with interactive art, barber and beauty shops, a chapel, movie theater, and a pub. The Domiciliary offers 88 private studio and one-bedroom apartments and includes dining rooms, gathering spaces, a fitness center, and outdoor patios. The Quincy Domiciliary building provides 88 private studios and one-bedroom apartments. The Domiciliary welcomed its first residents in January 2025. Note: The Long-Term Care building opened in September 2025 in FY 2026 and before the publishing of the 2025 Annual Report.

The project demolished six existing buildings and renovated the Neilson Dining Facility to include a multi-purpose space, administrative offices, and stores.

The project represents a federal-state partnership between the federal VA, the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Capital Development Board. The federal VA covers 65% of the total cost of the \$299,635,000 project, while the state of Illinois is responsible for the 35% balance.



The Prince Home

Located on the grounds of the Manteno Veterans' Home and opened in 2007, the Prince Home provides support and resources for veterans experiencing homelessness. The Prince Home staff provides each resident with the skills needed for successful independent living. The Home provides a

structured, safe, and caring environment, which instills a sense of dignity, belonging, and achievement, enhancing the opportunity to succeed. The Prince Home's vision is for residents to leave the program confident to achieve full-time employment and independent housing.

The Home's leadership advocates for homeless veterans statewide through networks with county and city governments, various state agencies, religious institutions, private and community organizations, the USDVA, and statewide veterans' organizations.

National Nurses' Week

Illinois veterans residing at the Illinois Veterans' Homes in Anna, Chicago, LaSalle, Manteno, and Quincy are cared for by highly professional nurses who deliver care with compassion and warmth. Their dedication allows us to honor our promise to care for the whole person, and the veterans' medical needs are central to their well-being. We celebrated IDVA nurses during National Nurses Week, May 6th-12th.



Veterans' Home at Quincy: Michele Hogan and Tyler Streeter.



U.S. Army veteran Paul Altgilbers danced with the Donut during the Salvation Army Donut Day.

Illinois Veterans' Advisory Council

The Illinois Veterans' Advisory Council (IVAC) was established effective July 1, 2004, by Public Act 093-0779. In accordance with the Act, council members include:

- Four members of the General Assembly are appointed one each by the President of the Senate, the Minority Leader of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives, preferably from a legislative or representative district in which a state-operated Veterans' home is located.
- Six Veterans appointed by the Director of Veterans' Affairs.
- One Veteran appointed by the commander or president of each Veteran Service Organization that is chartered by the federal government and by the State of Illinois and that elects to appoint an IVAC member.

In December 2024, new leadership was elected to the IVAC board: Chairman Robert Tyler & Vice-Chair Shannon Yount.

Public Act 96-1266 increased the council Membership to include:

- One person appointed by the Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard,
- One person appointed by the Illinois Attorney General
- One person appointed by the Illinois Secretary of State
- One person appointed by the Director of the Illinois Department of Employment Security
- One person appointed by each military family organization that is chartered by the federal government.

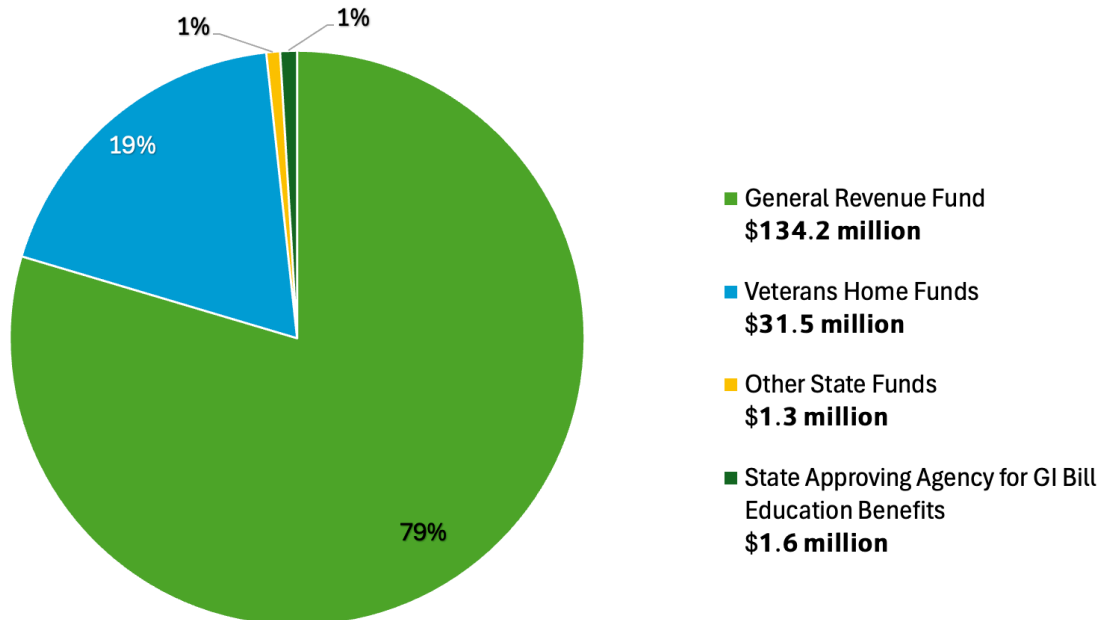
In addition, no member of the council shall be an employee or representative of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Members of the Council serve without compensation or reimbursement. The Council meets quarterly as required and is available to meet at the call of the Chair or at the call of the Director of Veterans Affairs or the Governor. The Department provides meeting space and clerical and administrative support services for the Council.

The Council is empowered to:

- Advise the Department of Veterans Affairs with respect to the fulfillment of its statutory duties.
- Review and study the issues and concerns that are most significant to Illinois Veterans and advise the Department on those issues and concerns.
- Receive a report from the Director of Veterans Affairs or the Director's designee at each meeting for the general activities of the Department.
- Report to the Governor and the General Assembly annually describing the issues addressed and the actions taken by the council during the year as well as any recommendations for the future.



Expenditures by Funding Source



THE DIRECTION OF IDVA

Strategic Plans: 2023-2027

The Institute for Healthcare Delivery Design conducted a study to better understand the needs of veterans and their families throughout Illinois. The information provided helped IDVA make strategic decisions about the resources and investments needed to best serve veteran communities and families for generations to come. From that study, these initiatives were identified to enhance IDVA's customer service to veterans and equip its team to serve veterans and the highest level.

Veteran Customer Service

- **Central Information Hub:** Primary touchpoint of learning and filing for benefits.
- **Benefit Self-Service Tools:** Allows veterans to schedule appointments and begin the claims process immediately.
- **Skill Building Workshops:** Equip veterans with transitional tools.
- **Adult Day Health Care:** Provide day care with support to caregivers and family.
- **Home Health Services:** Services for older veterans, including support for caregivers and family.
- **Geriatric Psychiatry:** Clinical support for veterans with dementia and mental health challenges.
- **Enhanced Marketing campaigns:** Educate veterans and the public through advertising and PR campaigns.

Staff Enhancements

- **Standardized appointments:** Tailored appointments to maximize interactions.
- **Floating VSOs:** on the ready to handle overflow tasks, requests, and claims.
- **Employee Knowledge Repository:** Library of resources to assist VSOs and staff.
- **Multi-channel contact center:** route all veteran inquiries from all platforms to the appropriate resource.
- **Customer Insight Platform:** Enable collection, analysis, and utilization of data to improve veterans' access to benefits and services.

