



# ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

833 SOUTH SPRING STREET, SPRINGFIELD, IL 62704

January 2, 2025

RE: Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, Annual Report

Dear Governor Pritzker and Members of the General Assembly:

The Department of Veterans Affairs Act, 20 ILCS 2805/2 (10), directs the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs to do the following:

- Make and publish annual reports to the Governor regarding the administration and general operation of the Department.

We have enclosed the annual report for FY24 for the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs.

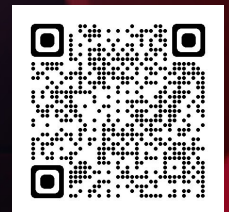
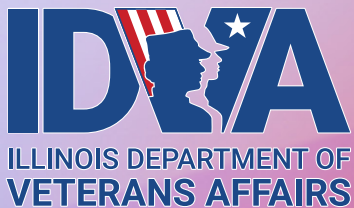
If there are any questions about this report, please contact our Communications Director, Maureen Hartigan, at (773) 590-9848. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Terry Prince  
IDVA Director

# ANNUAL REPORT

Fiscal Year 2024





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Letter from the Director</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Administration</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>IDVA Launches New Logo</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Agency Overview</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Field Services</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Education and Training</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Veterans Cash Lottery</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Central Office</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>Outreach Programs</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>Illinois Veterans' Homes</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>Anna</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>Chicago</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>LaSalle</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>Manteno</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>Quincy</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>Prince Home</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>Partnerships</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>FY2024 Budget</b> .....	<b>31</b>

Greetings! On behalf of Governor JB Pritzker and the nearly 1,300 employees of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA), thank you for taking the time to read the IDVA Annual Report for 2024. Over the last year, the agency continued to expand its efforts to help veterans and their families thrive in Illinois through our intense focus on people, operational excellence, and most importantly, the veteran experience.

In 2024, we were especially proud to roll out the new logo for the agency. Designed with input from our staff, and stakeholders around the state and utilizing a professional designer our logo was an immediate hit and let veterans know that this agency is their “North Star” for services and support. It is a regular reminder that they are our only reason for existence and that when they need us, they can count on IDVA to always be that beacon of hope.

As you will see in this report, IDVA’s primary functions are to serve veterans in any one of our five State Veterans’ Homes, two independent living facilities, and a location that houses up to 15 veterans experiencing homelessness. We also deploy over 60 Veterans Service Officers to assist veterans and their families with filing claims for United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability, compensation and pension. This program alone brought in nearly \$3.2 billion in annual payments directly to veterans in our state.

In 2025, we expect to see the first veterans move into our brand new, state of the art, \$300 million dollar veterans home in Quincy, IL. This 261,000 square foot home will house 210 veterans. On the other side, a 74,000 square foot domiciliary will provide apartments for 81 veterans seeking independent living accommodations. This project is a testament to Illinois’ ongoing commitment to demonstrating gratitude and respect for its veterans.

Finally, IDVA is home to the Veterans Education and Training program, Lottery Cash Grants division, veteran records department and the rest of the central office staff which all deliver on the agency’s mission, vision and guiding principles. I am grateful for the opportunity to work alongside this team and am inspired by their sincere desire to serve veterans. Whether they are veterans themselves, come from a military family, or are simply drawn to our mission, rest assured that we are a strong, innovative, and committed team.

Thank you for entrusting IDVA to serve over 550,000 Illinois veterans and fulfilling the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs’ mission of ensuring veterans thrive in Illinois. It is an honor to serve.

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



**Terry Prince**

Director

**Anthony Vaughn**

Assistant Director

**Melissa Black**

(until 7/8/23)

**LaTanya Law**

(until 2/24)

Vacant

(2/8-6/24)

Chief of Staff

**Jennifer Franklin**

Assistant to the Director

**Cynthia McKee**

Assistant to the Assistant Director  
(Acting)

**Alicia Utterback**

(until 11/10/23)

Vacant

Assistant to the Chief of Staff

**Sara Augustinas**

Legislative Liaison

**Maureen S. Hartigan**

Public Information Officer

**Brittany Hawkins**

General Counsel

**Kourtney Hopkins**

(until 6/2/23)

**Margo Watson**

(11/16/23)

Senior Program Manager  
Women Veterans Coordinator

**Franklin "Jay" Johnson**

Equal Employment Officer

**Stephanie Heckenkamp**

Chief Fiscal Officer

**Danielle N. Luevano**

Operations and Programs Manager

**Cindy Reynolds**

Senior Infection Preventionist

**Tammy Showers**

(until 8/9/23)

**Beatris Gonzalez**

(11/1/23)

Human Resources Director

**Lisa Tisdale**

**Franklin "Jay" Johnson**

(as of 4/24)

Labor Relations Administrator (Acting)

**Shannon Shymansky**

Grants Manager

**Dan Wellman**

Veterans Education and Training  
Services (VETS) Administrator

**Crystal Womack**

Senior Program Policy Advisor

**Rex Crossland**

Chief Internal Auditor

(as of 2/24)

## Field Services

**Mark Patterson**

Field Services Manager

**Ken Bonner**

Field Training Coordinator

**Robert Iverson III**

Metro Region Supervisor  
Claims Management Center  
Supervisor (Acting)

**Kimberly Fuiten**

Central Region Supervisor

**Jeffrey Lewis**

Southern Region Supervisor

**Melissa Beckford**

Northern Region Supervisor

## Veterans' Homes

**Angela Simmons**

Senior Home Administrator and  
Veterans' Home Administrator  
Anna (until 5/23)

**Amy Keistler**

(as of 5/23)

**T'Kira Siler-Wilkerson**

Veterans' Home Administrator  
Chicago

**Dena Robbins**

Veterans' Home Administrator (Acting)  
LaSalle

**Tanya Huston-Smith**

Veterans' Home Administrator  
Manteno

**Troy Culbertson**

(until 8/23)

**Charles Newton**

(12/23)

Veterans' Home Administrator  
Quincy

**Tanya Huston-Smith**

Prince Home Program Administrator

**Matthew McCormick**

Veterans' Home  
Construction Coordinator



Director Terry Prince was recognized for his 31 years of service in the U.S. Navy and his leadership at IDVA as part of the Chicago Cubs Military Salute. The crowd warmly welcomed him at the cold and rainy game, on April 7th, against the Los Angeles Dodgers.

## ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs introduced a new logo to elevate its visibility and to better connect with Illinois veterans. For 78 years, the agency was identified with the Illinois state seal, and while it is steeped in history, this is the first logo designed specifically for the agency.

The logo was created after comprehensive research including surveys, brainstorms, and reviews. The components in the logo contain important symbolism that reflects the mission of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs and those it serves.

“Our new logo reflects the evolution of IDVA as it has met the changing needs of Illinois veterans through innovation and technology while maintaining its commitment to ensuring that veterans thrive in Illinois,” said IDVA Director Terry Prince in announcing the new logo. “Its images honor those who have served in all branches of our nation’s military in every capacity around the globe.”

The primary design elements are illustrated in the “V” in IDVA:

- The red and white stripes represent the branches of the military.
- The silhouettes represent the diverse population of veterans who have served in uniform.
- The star communicates to veterans that IDVA is their North Star, a guide to serve them so they can thrive in Illinois.
- The red, white, and blue hues demonstrate pride in service and patriotism.

The new logo has been presented across the agency including printed materials, website, social media, branded materials, and new signage. To view an introductory video message from IDVA Director Terry Prince, [click here](#).

The logo was designed by Jessika Savage ([jessikasavage.com](http://jessikasavage.com)), Creative Director, Graphic Designer, and U.S. Army combat veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Jessika first worked with IDVA during college as part of the work-study program. She is proud to continue her work with IDVA by delivering branding to help better serve her fellow Illinois veterans.



*The Central Office team in Springfield unveils its new signage.*



*Team IDVA with Governor JB Pritzker at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum following the Gold Star Christmas Tree Lighting.*

(VSOs) assist in presenting claims to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) and other state agencies on behalf of veterans and their dependents or survivors; these claims may include disability compensation, education benefits, pensions, insurance, health care, and Veterans' Home applications.

IDVA is certified to provide skilled nursing and memory care for up to 1,134 veterans and Domiciliary care for 88 veterans each month through the Veterans' Homes in Anna, Chicago, LaSalle, Manteno, and Quincy. These homes primarily provide licensed, skilled nursing care beds available to veterans and eligible spouses and widows; Quincy and Anna also have a limited number of domiciliary beds for residents who do not require skilled care. The IDVA's Veterans' Homes are certified annually by the USDVA and licensed and inspected by the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH). The IDVA also provides housing and supportive services for homeless veterans at the 15-bed Prince Home in Manteno.

IDVA assists in coordinating services and activities among state and federal agencies, as well as with non-profit organizations that serve veterans. To accomplish this, IDVA staff serve on statutory committees and task forces and partner with several federal agencies, including the USDVA, the U.S. Small Business Administration, and the U.S. Department of Labor. IDVA has established and maintains a network of advocacy with a variety of state agencies including the Department of Employment Security, the Department of Corrections, the Department on Aging, the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Military Affairs, the Department of Children and Family Services, the Department of Public Health, and the Department of Healthcare and Family Services. IDVA proudly supports nationwide suicide prevention through the Governor's Challenge.

The administrative oversight of the IDVA is conducted at Central Office in Springfield and a second office in Chicago housing the following departments: communications, equal employment, fiscal, human resources, infection preventionist, information and technology, labor, legislative, operations, and programs. Each division is led by a professional with extensive experience in their field. This strong support system works closely with the Veteran Service Officers and Home Administrators to ensure they are equipped and supported to serve veterans efficiently and effectively.

Established in 1976 by Public Act 79-376, the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs is responsible for the welfare and needs of Illinois veterans, their dependents, and survivors. IDVA maintains administrative offices in Springfield and Chicago, five Veterans' Homes, 50 full-time Veteran Service Offices, and 38 itinerant offices across the state.

Through the field offices, veterans and their families obtain assistance in navigating the complex system of federal, state, and local resources and benefits. Acting as veterans' authorized representatives, the Department's accredited Veteran Service Officers





## CONGRATULATIONS

2023

## EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR

*Justin Buchanan*

PROPERTY MANAGER IN THE CENTRAL OFFICE

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) proudly announces Justin Buchanan, Property Manager in the Central Office, as the 2023 IDVA Employee of the Year.

Justin was selected from a talented pool of 16 other nominees for his steadfast commitment to the mission, vision and guiding principles of an agency serving over 550,000 veterans and their families. He approached every assignment with the highest level of professionalism, innovation, and positivity. He was tireless in his effort to ensure that every office was fully equipped with the technology needed to serve Illinois veterans effectively and efficiently. He contributes to a positive work environment and his impact is recognized across the Agency.

Justin joined IDVA in 2022 as a Property Manager and has also supported other roles including Telecom Coordinator, Vehicle Coordinator, and Agency Technical Service Requestor (ATSR).

"Congratulations, Justin, on this well-deserved recognition. You were nominated for your invaluable contributions to IDVA. Thank you for offering your talent, professionalism, and positive attitude. We are grateful for your work in serving Illinois veterans." Terry Prince, IDVA Director.



Field Services is divided into four regions: Metro, Northern, Central, Southern, and the Claims Management Center. The Field Manager oversees the activities related to claims and services provided through 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.



*DuQuoin State Fair: Southern Region Supervisor Jeffrey Lewis, VSO Tina Mocaby (Marion – Williamson Co), IDVA Director Terry Prince, and VSO Dax Griffith (Carbondale – Jackson Co).*



*Veteran Service Officers of Winnebago County Debbie Fuehrer and Michael Jay reached out to the community at the Boone County Fair.*

Through its Field Services Division, IDVA provides a statewide system of Veteran Service Officers (VSOs) who serve local veterans and establish networks within the local 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 recent addition of the USDVA PACT Act has greatly increased claims for the Claims Management Center. 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 increasing disability benefits. Additionally, VSOs assist in applying for admission to the Illinois Veterans' Homes, state and federal education, burial benefits, and federal health benefits. Our accredited Appeals VSOs coordinate directly with the USDVA's Veteran's Benefits Administration to present and represent claims, assist veterans in appealing decisions, and appear at hearings with the claimants before administrative law judges.

## Field Services Division Summary of Activity for FY 2024

<b>USDVA BENEFITS</b>	
<b>Veterans Pension</b> .....	<b>126</b>
<b>Widows Pension</b> .....	<b>155</b>
<b>Veterans Comp</b> .....	<b>4,708</b>
<b>Widows DIC</b> .....	<b>435</b>
<b>Parents DIC</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Appeals/Hearings</b> .....	<b>181/31</b>
<b>Hospital</b> .....	<b>551</b>



*Metro Region Supervisor Robert Iverson and Veteran Service Officer (Chicago) Cynthia McKee attend the Broadway Juneteenth event.*

In FY24 the Department's VSOs conducted **18,934** in-person and **46,016** telephonic interviews and prepared **17,259** state and federal applications for eligible Illinois veterans, dependents, and survivors. These services were instrumental in establishing new claims, and claims for increases in U.S. Veterans Affairs benefits for Illinois veterans, their dependents, and their survivors, securing **\$2,234,005** in newly awarded benefits. This fiscal year, the Department's VSOs submitted **5,424** original claims requesting monetary benefits through the U.S. Veterans Affairs. The Department represented **24,180** new and continuing awards, which brought the state in **\$569,071,511** in FY24.

Service to veterans continues through outreach to the community by participating in special events locally. The VSOs doubled their attendance in FY2024 to 175 from 99 in FY 2023. 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 **13** Veteran Service Officers and **14** Field Staff.



*Cook County Department of Corrections Mental Health Awareness Day. Left to right: Chicago Vet Center Veterans Outreach Specialist Alfonso Lopez, Veteran Service Officer Anthony Hernandez, USDVA Communications Specialist Outreach Coordinator Lisa Mendez, Metro Region Supervisor Robert Iverson, Senior Program Manager/Women Veterans Coordinator Margo Watson, Special Assistant to Executive Director Cook County Department of Corrections Oneta Sampson.*



*Illinois Joining Forces*  
Veteran Service Officer Mark Robinson (second from left) sits on a panel at the Illinois Joining Forces Summit in Peoria addressing best practices for supporting Service Members, Veterans, and their families during times of transition. Pictured left to right: Michelle Kaydus, Illinois Consultant, Military OneSource, Mark Robinson, VSO, IDVA, Eric Peterson, President/Founder, Project Headspace and Timing, Scott Grotbo, Founder, Moraine View R&R Foundation. Standing at the podium: Brenda Osuch, Executive Director, Illinois Joining Forces

## VSO Matt Taylor Conducts VA Benefits Class at Rock Valley Community College

As part of an effort to educate veterans about their benefits, IDVA Veteran Service Officer Matt Taylor taught a class about VA Benefits at Rock Valley College (RCV). Matt Taylor and Milana Herman, Program Manager of Veterans Affairs at RVC, addressed local veteran programs. Matthew discussed VA Health Care and the VA Benefits Administration Program. His goal was to provide solid, objective resources for applications and resources. He also discussed the Illinois Veterans Grant for Education and IDVA's five Veterans' Homes.

## Veteran Service Officer Recruiting Campaign

IDVA ambitiously recruited, hired, and trained 13 Veteran Service Officers, so they could easily meet veterans where they are. As part of the recruiting effort, IDVA created a social media campaign highlighting Veteran Service Officers and their passion for their work. These are a few examples:

### The Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs is hiring Veteran Service Officers

IDVA is recruiting combat-era Veterans eager to help Veterans, retirees, spouses, and dependents obtain their earned federal and state benefits and services.



**Shyngae Murphy**, VSO Metro Region

Shyngae Murphy served in the United States Navy from 2006-2010 aboard the USS John C. Stennis. She was an Aviation Maintenance Administration (AZ) tasked with managing Naval aircraft maintenance to keep aircraft and aviation equipment in top working order.

She has been a Veterans' Service Officer (VSO) for six years. She began her career on the appeals team, taking veterans' and dependents' cases to the Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA). As a rookie, she was scared but showed no fear because of her love of advocating for Veterans and their dependents. She later moved to the Metro Division.

**On serving Veterans:** "Being a VSO has taught me patience and empathy. I love helping Veterans fight for their justice."

For more information and to apply:



### The Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs is hiring Veteran Service Officers

IDVA is recruiting combat-era Veterans eager to help Veterans, retirees, spouses, and dependents obtain their earned federal and state benefits and services.



**Meet Mark Patterson**, Field Services Manager

Mark retired March 2015 after 28 years of service with active Army, Army Reserve and Army National Guard, attaining the rank of Chief Warrant Officer 3. He participated in Desert Shield/Desert Storm, December 1990 through May 1991, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Tikrit, Iraq, March 2003 through April 2004 and Operation Enduring Freedom, Paktia Province, Afghanistan, November 2008 through August 2009. December 2022 marked my 30th year with IDVA. He was a Veterans Service Officer for 19 years and has been the Field Services Manager since December 2020.

**On serving Veterans:** "As a VSO, you navigate, coordinate, and strategize the path to obtaining the Veterans earned benefits and services that can be life changing. Although some benefits take time, it is not an abstract process. There are few things more rewarding than after working together and building a relationship when a fellow Veteran receives his or her earned benefits. Having a role in making this happen is incredible."

For more information and to apply:



The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs' Veterans Education and Training Section consists of three veterans' education and training programs: one federally funded program and two state 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 Veteran's Dependents Scholarship.

## STATE APPROVING AGENCY

The State Approving Agency (SAA) is a completely 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 FY24, the SAA provided Illinois veterans with opportunities to train at **1,306** approved education and training facilities. These numbers include educational programs at **181** universities, colleges, and community colleges, **117** vocational schools, and **376** high schools for dependents using the Survivors and Dependents Education Assistance program. The State Approving Agency also approved **567** 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 FY24, 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 with approved education and training facilities and monthly roundtable discussions with veterans coordinators at public universities, community colleges, and non-profit universities and colleges. The Veterans Education and Training Section also joined the Military Order of the Purple Heart as co-sponsors of the Illinois Student Veteran Leader of the Year program.

## PROGRAM APPROVALS AND CANCELLATIONS

- New, Revised, Other Institutions of Higher Learning Approval Actions: 10,431
- Programs and Institutions of Higher Learning Withdrawn: 504
- New, Revised, Other Non-College Degree Program Actions: 6696
- Programs and Non-College Degree Programs Withdrawn: 288
- New, Revised, Other Apprenticeship Approval Actions: 407
- Programs and Apprenticeships Withdrawn: 32
- Programs and On-The-Job Training Approval Actions: 762
- Programs and On-The-Job Training Programs Withdrawn: 267
- New, Revised, Other Flight School Approval Actions: 38
- Programs and Flight School Programs Withdrawn: 0
- Programs and License and Certification Tests Approval Actions: 55
- Programs and License and Certification Tests Withdrawn: 3
- Total Approval and Withdrawal Actions: 19,483

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

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. FY24 demonstrated significant growth in claims and distribution.

In **FY24**, there were **2,381** claims for a total of **\$9,394,117.36**. The summer of 2023 had **359** claims at **\$667,932.99**. While the Fall 2023 term saw **999** claims at **\$4,305,620.25**, and the Spring 2024 term resulted in **1,023** claims at **\$4,420,564.12**. Illinois public universities and community colleges graciously absorbed the remaining **\$5,894,177.36**.

Summer 23	\$ 667,932.99	359
Fall 23	\$ 4,305,620.25	999
Spring 24	\$ 4,420,564.12	1023
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 9,394,117.36</b>	<b>2381</b>

## Deceased, Disabled, and MIA/POW Veterans Dependent Grant

Disabled, and MIA/POW Veterans Dependent Grant provides an annual \$250 grant to each eligible dependent between the ages of 10 and 18 for enrollment in a school or for meeting Illinois compulsory attendance requirements as provided in the Illinois School Code.

In FY24, there were 596 claims approved during the academic year at **\$149,000** for a program funded at \$100,000. FY24 funds paid 21 FY23 claims at **\$5,250** and **IDVA will use FY25 funds to pay 217 FY24 claims.**

## 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 the [VSO Offices](#) of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, 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](http://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, 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.





*From left to right: Dan Wellman, Illinois MOPH State Senior Vice Commander and IDVA Veterans Education and Training Services Administrator, Michael Jacobson, award recipient and U.S. Marine Corps veteran, Dr. Mia Garcia-Hills, Director of the Student Veterans Affairs Office of the Dean of Students, and Terry Prince, IDVA Director*

## Student Veteran Leader of the Year

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) and the Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH) presented the 2024 Illinois Student Veteran of the Year Award to U.S. Marine Corps veteran Michael Jacobson, Mechatronics, Robotics, and Automation Engineering PhD candidate at the University of Illinois, Chicago. Michael also earned his B.S. in Mechanical Engineering at the University of Illinois, Chicago.

Michael served five years in the U.S. Marine Corps including conducting counter-insurgency operations in Afghanistan under Operation Enduring Freedom. The Good Conduct Medal and Combat Action Ribbon recognized him for exemplary service.

In nominating Michael, Dr. Mia Garcia-Hills, Director of the Student Veterans Affairs Office of the Dean of Students, pointed to his involvement with the UIC's Student Veterans Center, mentorship of undergraduate students, and his innovative approach to his studies.

As a student veteran, Michael volunteered with Breaking the Chains, a rescue team that extracts animals of all types to safety from dangerous conditions worldwide. Michael's mission was in Ukraine where he participated in saving animals abandoned because of the war. As a PhD candidate, he researches machine learning and has developed prototypes of robotic prosthetics designed to support persons with critical injuries.

Michael was selected among an impressive pool of student veteran candidates who demonstrate a strong engagement with their college/university and/or the wider community. Recipients portray leadership characteristics and excellence in academics. They serve as role models for the student veteran body by volunteering, participating in events, academic achievement, reaching out to fellow student veterans, and portraying an overall positive attitude. This is the fifth year the award has been presented.



## IDVA Director Terry Prince and Lottery Director Harold Mays Launch the Winter Riches Lottery Ticket Benefiting Veterans

The Veterans Cash Lottery ticket is the Illinois Lottery’s specialty ticket supporting Illinois veterans. This \$2 ticket was promoted and sold annually from November to February. All net 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 **432** grants totaling **\$23 million**. In FY24, the Veterans Cash division awarded **24** grants totaling **\$1,861,220.21**, with typical grant amounts ranging from \$25,000 to \$100,000 annually.

The Grant Committee, composed 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 FY24 are Edgar Delgado (Veteran-at-Large), Colonel Robert Tyler (IVAC), and Betsy Tolstedt, who also serves as the committee chairperson.

### Summary of Activity for FY 2024

GRANTS MADE BY CATEGORY	NUMBER OF GRANTS	TOTAL AMOUNT
Post-Traumatic Stress.....	9	\$615,839
Veteran Disability Benefits.....	1	\$100,000
Health Insurance Costs.....	0	\$0
Veteran Long-Term Care .....	0	\$0
Veteran Employment & Employment Training.....	8	\$625,670
Veteran Homelessness.....	4	\$447,355
Veteran Emergency Funding.....	2	\$72,355
<b>TOTAL.....</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>\$1,861,220</b>



## Legislative Division

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

In FY24, IDVA's primary legislative effort was the FY25 introduced budget. IDVA's FY25 introduced budget passed in the FY25 budget bill, SB 251.

It contained the following:

- A \$23.1 million increase over FY23
- A \$7.5 million reduction in General Revenue Funds (GRF)
- A \$30.4 million increase in Other State Funds (OSF)
- A \$212,400 increase in Federal Funds (FF)



*Team Budget: left to right: Special Advisor to the Director for Budget David Moody, Chief Fiscal Officer Steph Heckenkamp, Director Terry Prince, Assistant Director Anthony Vaughn, and Legislative Director Sara Augustinas*

In addition to drafting and following the progress of its initiative, the division's Legislative Director also monitors legislation related to agency needs and operations. In FY24, the division's Legislative Director tracked up to 110 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 22 of these bills passed out of both chambers.

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

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



Finally, in FY 2024, the division's Legislative Director closed 181 constituent cases that came from the Governor's Office of Constituent Affairs (GOCA), district staffers, and legislators.

Senator Durbin visited the Veterans' Home at Chicago to discuss progress, challenges, and solutions for the Home, while also visiting with veterans.

*U.S. Senator Dick Durbin visits with Edward Kuelsza, 104 year-old old World War II veteran*

## **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 made up 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. In 2023, the DoIT-IDVA IT team created and implemented a new Veterans Services locator site on the IDVA website. This will make it easier for the veterans of Illinois to locate needed services and speak with a Veterans Services Officer.

## **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 ensures 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. Throughout FY24, IDVA, like many healthcare institutions, has suffered extreme staff shortages. HR has diligently sought creative ways to recruit and retain talent to care for our veterans, including on-site job fairs.



*IDVA Director Terry Prince, Human Resources Director Beatris Gonzalez, and Hiring Resource Team Lead Allison Stadtman.*

## 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 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 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 \$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 the maintenance management of the Central Office automobile fleet of five (5) vehicles. It is also responsible for the incoming and outgoing correspondence, with 6,612 pieces processed in FY24. 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 discharges from 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 also continuously scans veteran records obtained through the years that pre-date automated capabilities. This division also 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, **6,129,701 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 **\$415,000 in state benefits** to veterans across the state of Illinois in FY24.

## **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.

When the IP joined IDVA, the primary focus was on preventing and containing COVID-19, which has been successful. While COVID-19 is still a focus, the IP is developing and implementing other infection-related policies within the homes and educating staff, residents, and families.

## **The Public Information Officer (PIO)**

The Public Information Officer (PIO) creates and produces internal and external communications for the agency. The veteran community is broad, and it is integral that IDVA reaches them across all platforms.

The PIO oversees printed literature, social media, the IDVA website, and electronic newsletters communicating relevant and current information regarding benefits, services, and IDVA programs and events. The PIO also publishes the Agency's annual report in compliance with legislative mandate.

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

**Media relations** is critical to inform the public about events, benefits, and issues, particularly around COVID-19, infectious diseases, and other concerns involving the Veterans' Homes. The PIO drafts and disseminates media advisories, press releases, statements, letters to the editor, and public service announcements.

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

The **Veterans Connections newsletter** 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](#).

**Social Media** platforms are a useful tool for communicating to veterans and the community regarding benefits, events, programs, and remembrance days.

- Visit on 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)
- Visit on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/il-idva/>

**Speeches, statements, scripts, and internal messages** delivered by the Agency's Director are drafted by the PIO.

The **Annual Report** is assembled, in-part written, edited, and published by the PIO. They can be [found here](#).

**Communications** support is provided to the Homes, VSOs, Human Resources, and Fiscal by the PIO. This includes materials for events, hiring fairs, remarks, and presentations.

In FY24, IDVA disseminated the following:

- 22 press releases, advisories, and statements
- 295 Social media posts - FB and LinkedIn
- 12 VC newsletter distribution (constant contact, FB, LinkedIn, VSO partners, and internal)
- 7 Video messages (social and PSAs)
- 7 Radio PSAs
- Annual Report



*Operations and Programs Division Manager Danielle Luevano and Director Terry Prince record "Conversation with the Director," an opportunity for IDVA employees to ask questions of the Director.*



*Brittany Chitwood, Business Administrator for the Veterans' Home at Chicago, is interviewed by CBS News reporter Lauren Victory.*

IDVA offers veterans and their families 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 Program Policy Advisor administers these programs and gatherings along with collaborating with 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 FY24, the families gathered in Springfield for two days of programs, events, and gatherings. The families shared stories and honored their hero through tears and laughter. The weekend concluded with the Yellow Rose ceremony, a remembrance of the sacrifices of the hero and their family.



*Gold Star Families gather in Springfield for Gold Star Families Weekend.*



*Governor JB Pritzker, Gold Star Mother Gay Eisenhower, IDVA Director and Gold Star family member Michael Sullivan, hang ornaments on the Gold Star Christmas tree*

## Gold Star Christmas Tree Lighting

The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum (ALPLM) displayed Illinois' Gold Star Family Christmas Tree; the first tree dedicated only to Gold Star families. The tree was lit by Governor JB Pritzker on December 4th, in a ceremony attended by the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs Director Terry Prince, Major General Richard Neely, and Gold Star Families. The tree holds 349 ornaments, each displaying the name of a hero who died in combat.

“The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum (ALPLM) generously agreed to display the Gold Star Family Tree,” said IDVA Director Terry Prince. “We are grateful for their partnership in ensuring that the tree is available for visitors through December to remember and reflect on those lives that were lost protecting our nation.”

## Desert Storm Remembrance Program

February 28, 2024, marked the 33rd 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 32nd anniversary of Operation Desert Storm Cease-Fire on February 28th at the Illinois State Museum in Springfield.



## 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 2023, 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, “No One Fights Alone,” and keynote speakers offered their experiences and perspectives. Lunch was offered to veterans and their families. It is an opportunity to connect and build community.



### Veterans Day at the Springfield State Fair

*Left: State Commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart, Joe Schaler, offers a warm welcome to the Gold Star Families on Veterans Day at the Illinois State Fair. IDVA and the Illinois veteran community lost Joe Schaler on May 29, 2024, a true hero and champion for veterans and their families. Joe, a United States Marine Corps veteran, served in Vietnam. IDVA is grateful to Joe for his service to our nation and all Illinois veterans.*



*Right: Assistant Director Anthony Vaughn addresses veterans at the main program at the Springfield State Fair.*



*IDVA Director Terry Prince speaks during the main program at Veterans Day at the DuQuoin State Fair.*



*Director of Nursing Shelly Miller, Home Administrator Amy Keistler, IDVA Director Terry Prince, Senior Home Administrator Angela Simmons, and Assistant Director of Nursing Lori Godwin showcase the Veterans' Home at Anna at the DuQuoin State Fair.*

## Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs and the Elk Lodge 158 commemorated the 82nd 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.



*Left to right: Director Terry Prince, Springfield Ward 7 Alderman Brad Carlson, Springfield Mayor Misty Buscher, Parade Organizer Phil Brown, also Commander of the InterVeterans Council of Sangamon County, and IDVA's Senior Program Policy Advisor Crystal Womack.*





## Operation Rising Spirit

After Thanksgiving through the New Year, IDVA executes Operation Rising Spirit requesting the public to send notes of gratitude to veterans in the five state Veterans' Homes in Anna, Chicago, LaSalle, Manteno, and Quincy. The program is a wonderful holiday project for schools, businesses, organizations, communities, families, and individuals to bring joy to a veteran.

*IDVA Director and Senior Program Policy Advisor Crystal Womack display hundreds of notes for veterans in IDVA Veterans' Homes.*

## Memorial Day

### Director Prince Delivers Remarks at the Mount Prospect Memorial Day Ceremony

Director Terry Prince was the grand marshal of the Mount Prospect annual Memorial Day parade and the keynote speaker at the ceremony. In his remarks, he said, "While Memorial Day may be the unofficial kickoff to the summer, we know it is so much more than that. Yes, we will conclude today's Memorial Day ceremony with fellowship, but across our nation, many families are not celebrating today. I recently read a post, by an unknown author reading: "Today will be the most expensive holiday on the calendar. Every hot dog, every burger, every spin around the lake, or drink with friends and family...is a debt...purchased by others. This holiday comes at a cost, paid for by those who made the ultimate sacrifice in life and blood; whose moms never saw them again, whose dads wept in private, whose wives raised kids alone, and whose kids only remember through pictures. This isn't simply a day off. It is a day to remember that others paid for every free breath we ever get to take."



## 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.

## Purple Up Day: In Honor of Military Children

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



*Veterans' Home at Chicago shows their support of Military Children.*



*Margo Watson, Senior Program Manager/Women Veterans Coordinator, discussed Suicide Prevention at the 95th American Legion's Annual Patriotic Conference. More than 200 people attended the program at the President Abraham Lincoln Hotel.*

## Women Veterans

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.



## Women Veterans Recognition Month

In honor of Women Veterans Recognition Month, IDVA hosted a Women Veterans' Panel including IDVA's Women Veterans Coordinator Margo Watson and IDVA Central IDVA Region Supervisor Kimberly Yantis. Held at the Elks Lodge in Springfield, women veterans shared their military experiences and discussed their unique challenges, particularly healthcare in the Springfield area, applying for VA benefits, and benefits specifically for women. IDVA's Women Veterans Program will continue to offer opportunities, resources, and community for women veterans. If you would like to become part of this supportive community, visit:

<https://veterans.illinois.gov/programs/women.html>



*Left to right: Jim Dixon, Kimberly Yantis (IDVA Central Region Supervisor), Carry Kasten, Marilda Eadie, Rose Connolly, Lauralee Treece, and Margo Watson (IDVA Women Veterans Coordinator).*

## Homelessness

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs joined an Interagency Task Force with the Illinois Office to Prevent and End Homelessness to develop a plan 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.

## 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 delivering of messages.

The Governor's Challenge also launched its training portal for people to become 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.

## Illinois Warrior Assistance Program

IDVA entered a one-year contract with Illinois Joining Forces to execute the Illinois Warrior Assistance Program (IWAP), a 24/7 warm helpline and resource for Illinois Veterans, their families, and caregivers. This free and confidential service was initiated by the State of Illinois in 2011 to assist Veterans transitioning from military service and challenged with PTSD, mild TBI, Military sexual trauma, stress, anxiety, depression, addiction, substance abuse, and overall emotional wellness.

IWAP provides the following services:

- Access to a 24/7 warm helpline
- Resource navigation
- Case management which includes assessment, case planning, implementation (service connection), monitoring, and follow-up
- Referral to behavioral health services placement after 24/7 access to a warm helpline

The confidential warm helpline number is 877-455-IWAP (4297), and the website is [www.Illinoiswarrior.org](http://www.Illinoiswarrior.org). The warm helpline is not a hotline, crisis line, or suicide prevention line. Those in crisis should call, 988 and select one (1), or dial 911.

## Veteran Service-Related Ailments Task Force

The Veterans Service-Related Ailments Task Force began in February 2022 and dissolved in December 2023. The Task Force members met bimonthly, and they were charged with two specific tasks:

- 1) Reviewing and making recommendations regarding veterans' service-related ailments that are not recognized by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, including exploring why certain service-related ailments are not recognized and determining what may be done to have them recognized. AND
- 2) Assessing the way the State of Illinois can improve the rate at which the federal government approves disability compensation claims and correct the disparity between the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' approval of disability compensation for Illinois Veterans and that which is approved for veterans in other states.

At the end of its first year, the Task Force submitted a report that summarized its work and made recommendations. This was submitted to the Governor and General Assembly by December 31, 2022, and can be found here.

Near the midpoint of its second year, in May 2023, the Task Force participated in a House Veterans' Affairs Committee subject matter hearing on the report.

The Task Force's final work consisted of reviewing the number of veterans service officers across the State and determining, geographically, where more veteran service officers may be needed.

## 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 enhances the lives of veterans tremendously. Each Home is unique in its setting and united in its commitment to caring for the whole person.

## Volunteer Fair

Since COVID-19, the Veterans' Homes across the state have lost many volunteers. Across the nation, volunteers dropped seven percent, from 30 to 23 percent, between 2019-2021. The Homes, because of COVID-19 and mandated restrictions, experienced an even greater decline in volunteerism. Building back IDVA's volunteer base is critical to providing important services and opportunities for residents in its care.

As part of National Volunteer Week, The Illinois Veterans' Home at Manteno invited veteran service providers, community organizations, and individuals to a volunteer fair to learn more about volunteer opportunities and enjoy food from local food trucks. Volunteers shared their experiences of engaging with veterans and the opportunities available.



*Volunteer Coordinator Rebecca Wilder with volunteers and fishermen Ken Kros, (left) and Bob Huges.*



*Volunteer Jenny Bridgeman dancing with U.S. Army veteran Ed Beaupre during a K-n-I Drifters performance.*



## VETERANS' HOME AT ANNA

The Illinois Veterans' Home at Anna is a 50-bed, skilled care nursing facility with six domiciliary apartments. Situated on 16.1 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 is undergoing a nearly \$3 million construction project slated for completion in 2024. The project includes replacing HVAC units on the rooftop and resident's 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 will elevate the residents' daily comfort, and the new windows and doors will brighten 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.



## VETERANS' HOME AT CHICAGO

The Illinois Veterans Home at Chicago, located at 4250 N. Oak Park Avenue in 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, barber shop, bank, and rehabilitation center. Housekeeping, laundry, and dietary 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 Veterans Service Officer is available to assist the veteran with questions regarding state and federal benefits.



*Veterans' Home at Chicago resident Thomas Rehm, U.S. Air Force veteran, and IDVA Director Terry Prince.*



## VETERANS' HOME AT LASALLE

The Illinois Veterans' Home at LaSalle is a 190-person home providing skilled, recreational, rehabilitative, therapy, social services, and pastoral care since 1990. The home offers a bank, barber shop, and library. Gracious outdoor spaces include a commemorative peace garden with a walking path 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 construction 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. The project is ongoing through FY25.



*Veterans' Home at LaSalle walking path and garden.*



## 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 1/2-acre man-made pond, stocked and landscaped, with a pavilion where veterans can enjoy the outdoors and "catch-and-release" fishing.



*Veterans' Home at Manteno volunteer Kathy Call and resident Louis King, U.S. Army, Korean War.*



## VETERANS' HOME AT QUINCY

In 1886, 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 250 residents reside in skilled nursing and domiciliary care nursing 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, a chapel, 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 and are 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.

The Home is currently well into a nearly \$300 Million construction project including a campus rehabilitation of buildings, infrastructure, utilities, and landscaping to support the new facilities. The project demolished six existing buildings, and renovation of the Neilson Dining Facility to include a multi-purpose space, administrative offices, and stores. The long-term care facility is projected to house 210 skilled care beds, with full amenities. The independent living building will host 80 independent living units, with accommodations large enough for resident spouses.

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.



*Construction of the new Veterans' Home at Quincy is underway.*



## 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 state-wide 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 Nursing Week May 6th-12th.



*Veterans' Home at Quincy: Left to right: Julia Togarepi – Director of Nursing, Brad Florea – In-Service Coordinator/Employee Health Nurse, Tammy Sullivan – Nursing Supervisor, Schapers, Lindsey Kelley – Infection Control, Amanda Tournear – EHR/MDS (Electronic Health Records/ Minimum Data Set), Lynn Dingerson – Psych Nurse*



*Veterans' Home at Manteno: Angela Sartore, Tim Splear, Jessica Arseneau, and Brandy Sims.*



## National CNA Week

We celebrated the Certified Nursing Assistants in our five Veterans' Homes during National CNA Week June 13th-19th. The week's theme was, "We'll Be There For You," which resonates with the professional and compassionate care they provide Illinois veterans. We are fortunate that they have chosen IDVA.



*Veterans' Home at Chicago: VNAC  
Kenshwar Kelley and resident Kenneth  
Moss – U.S. Army veteran*



*Veteran's Home at Anna: left to right: Bonnie Brimm, Rich Tripp, Tasha Mealer,  
Danielle Lowe, Debbie Walls, Jamie McWilliams*

## Activity Professionals Week

January 21-27th was Activity Professionals Week. IDVA's Veterans' Homes in Anna, Chicago, LaSalle, Manteno, and Quincy, are fortunate for 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 activity department staff: Left to right: Taylor Schott,  
Kassandra Seaborn, Mary McDermott, and Jerry Bacidore*

## 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 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 2022, new leadership was elected to the IVAC board: Keith Wetherell, Chairman and Robert Tyler, Vice Chairman.

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.

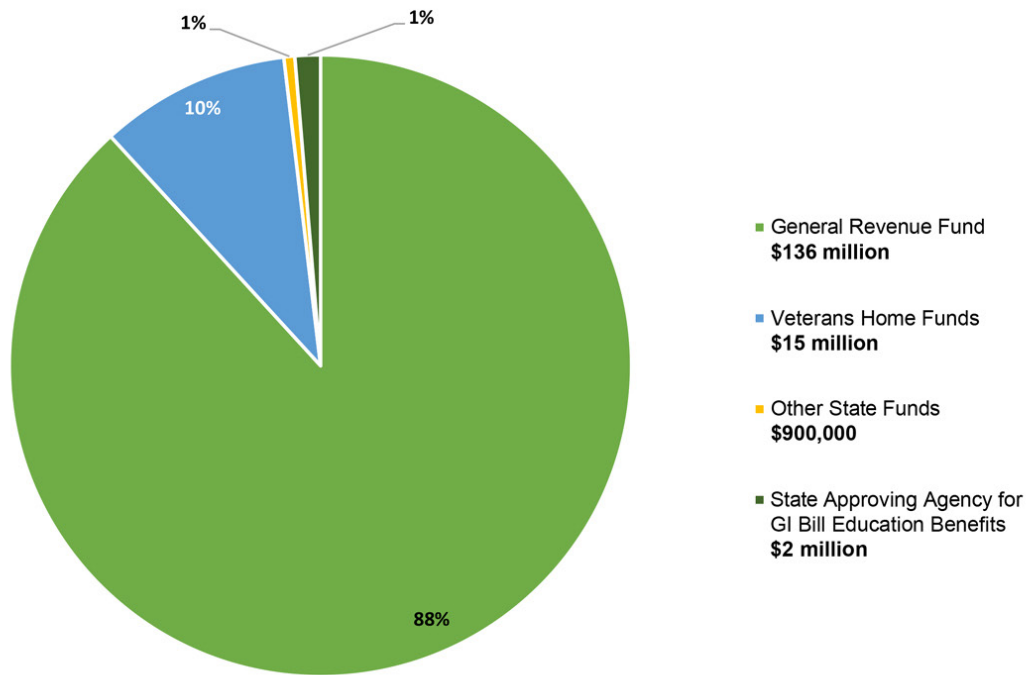
In addition, no member of the council shall be an employee or representative of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Members of the Council serve without compensation or reimbursement. The Council meets quarterly as required and is available to meet at the call of the Chair or at the call of the Director 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:

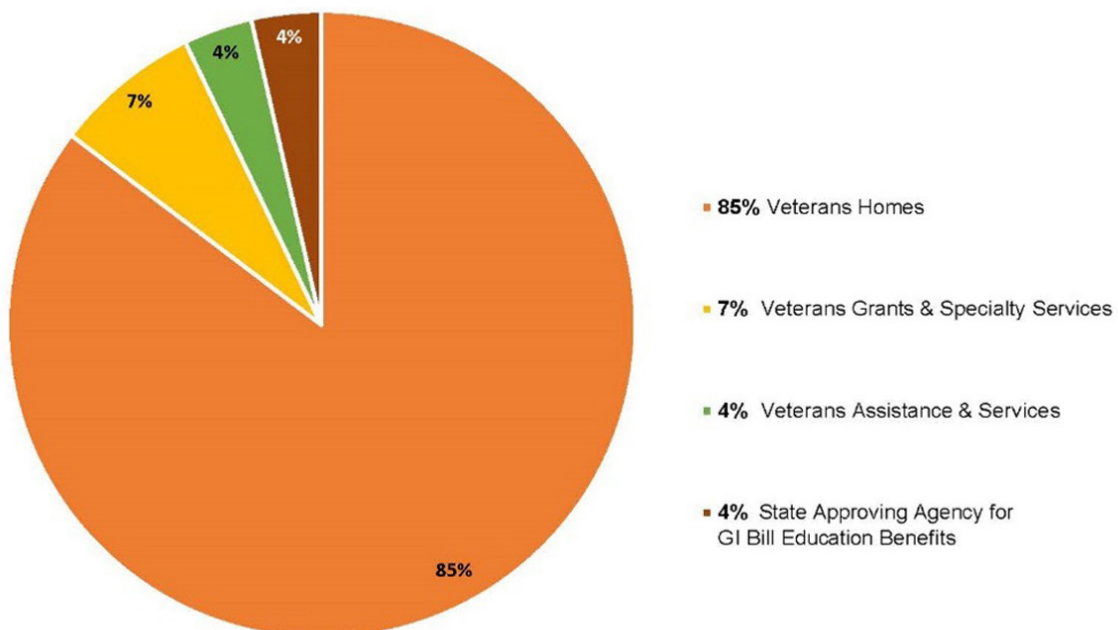
- Advise the Department of Veterans Affairs with respect to the fulfillment of its statutory duties.
- Review and study the issues and concerns that are most significant to Illinois Veterans and advise the Department on those issues and concerns.
- Receive a report from the Director of Veterans Affairs 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 future action.



## Expenditures by Funding Source



## Expenditures by Program







**IDVA**  
ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF  
VETERANS AFFAIRS