



VETERANS CONNECTIONS

News from the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs ★ Volume 4, Issue 6 ★ June 2024



★ Message from IDVA Director Terry Prince

IDVA is pleased to share that its ambitious FY2025 budget request of \$238 million, an 11 percent increase over the FY2024 budget, has been approved. The IDVA fiscal team diligently assessed the entire Agency's needs and assembled a solid budget that permits IDVA to better serve a broad veteran community.

Our budget allows IDVA to increase the number of Veteran Service Officers around the state, fill the beds at the five Veterans' Homes, and increase staff in critical positions. It is well known that across the nation, healthcare providers are challenged with hiring medical professionals to care for skilled nursing home residents. IDVA is engaged in an aggressive hiring campaign to recruit qualified professionals who align with our mission, vision and guiding principles.

We are fast approaching the start of the county and state fair season and our VSOs have been all over the state to meet with veterans and discuss their benefits and resources. Take note that the Veterans Day Events at the Springfield State Fair will be on August 11th, and the DuQuoin State Fair will occur on August 25. This is a great opportunity to come out and honor Illinois' veterans and Gold Star Families. Each of the fairs will include programming and a resource fair with representation from veteran service organizations across the state. It's a wonderful time of remembrance, celebration, and, of course, fair food.



You do not have to wait for the State Fair to connect to your IDVA. I encourage veterans, families, survivors and caregivers seeking benefits and services to reach out to a VSO in your area. They have up-to-date knowledge about benefits and services and the process of obtaining them. They work one-on-one with veterans to learn about their goals and needs and are invested in their future. You'll meet a few of our newest members of the VSO team in this newsletter. [Click here](#) to find a VSO near you.

Thank you for staying connected to IDVA and have a great summer!

Sincerely,

Terry Prince

U.S. Navy Veteran and IDVA Director

IDVA's Approved FY25 Budget at a Glance

Overall, the IDVA was appropriated \$237.5 million for the FY25 budget, a 10.8% increase from the \$214.3 million appropriated in FY24. From this, the IDVA saw an 8.3% increase in federal funding (FF), an 86.6% increase in non-general revenue fund state funds (OSF), and a 4.2% increase in general revenue funds (GRF).

IDVA's central office saw a 17% increase in personal services, a 15% increase in state contributions to Social Security, a 10% increase for the Veterans Accountability Unit, and a 200% increase for the Deceased, Disabled, and MIA/POW Veterans' Dependents Educational Opportunity Grant.

IDVA's Field Services division saw a 3% increase in personal services and a 2% increase in state contributions to social security. Field services consist of Veterans Service Officers (VSOs) who assist in presenting claims to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and other state agencies on behalf of veterans and their dependents or survivors. VSOs work individually with veterans to understand their unique circumstances, needs, and goals, and to identify benefits and services that they can utilize.

An additional \$3.5 million was appropriated for the Chicago home, a 233% increase from FY24. Each of IDVA's homes saw increases for FY25. For the Anna home, there was a 37% increase in GRF and a 25% increase in OSF for personal services. For the Quincy home, there was a 261% increase in OSF for personal services, as well as a 9% increase in GRF and 14% increase in OSF in their lump sum fund. The LaSalle home saw an increase of 193% in OSF. Lastly, the Manteno home's OSF funds for personal services increased by 198% from FY24. IDVA's homes in Anna, Chicago, LaSalle, Manteno, and Quincy provide licensed, skilled care beds available to veterans and eligible spouses and widows. The IDVA also provides housing and supportive services for homeless veterans at the 15-bed Prince Home in Manteno. The Prince Home had a 237% increase in appropriated funds from OSF for FY25. The cost to provide care at the homes has increased, which is why IDVA's FY25 budget was enhanced. This cost stems from higher costs of food, medical supplies, energy, and personnel expenses.

Another large increase was a payroll increase of 19% due to union labor contracts. The teams at our homes are extensive to provide the best care possible: directors of nursing, CNAs, social workers, activities directors, etc. IDVA would also like to use the appropriated funds to hire a medical director for the homes.

The State Approving Agency lump sum saw an 8.9% increase for the GI Education Fund. IDVA's State Approving Agency approves college and non-college degree programs so that federal educational assistance benefits may be paid to veterans and other eligible persons under the several programs administered by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Monthly Highlights

CNA Week

National Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) Week was from June 13th to 19th when IDVA recognized our CNAs caring for veterans at our five Veterans' Homes in Anna, Chicago, LaSalle, Manteno, and Quincy. CNAs allow us to deliver on our promise of caring for the whole person through extraordinary health care offered with gratitude and compassion. We thank them for their unmatched service, care, and support of our veterans.



Veterans' Home at Chicago



Left to right: Tramika Robinson, (housekeeping), (CNA) Karen Daley, Kenshuar Kelley

Veterans' Home at Anna



Left to right: Kitta McClung, Scott Cox, Melissa Pullett, Bonnie Cast, Brandy Eads, Jessica Davis, Skira Harper, Melissa Tripp, Noaah Tyson, Ruby Dunn



Samuel Loconti talks with VNAC Denise Poore



Left to right: Bonnie Brimm, Rich Tripp, Tasha Mealer, Danielle Lowe, Debbie Walls, Jamie McWilliams



Kenshuar Kelley with veteran Ken Moss

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Monthly Highlights

Veterans' Home at LaSalle



Left to right: Margaret Bute, Ashley Vandewyngaerde, Jennifer Kuhne-Hubbard, Adriana Guerra, and Rylee Ponder

Veterans' Home at Manteno



Taylor Pallissard, Tonya Sarkozi, Laura Torres



Bari Gage, Lona Sandy, Hali Moore, and Heather Bopes



Angela Sartore, Tim Splear, Jessica Arseneau, Brandy Sims



Margaret Siebert and Amber Lohman



Sarah Quick, Megan Thornton, Tavasias Terrell

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Monthly Highlights



Alicia Zepeda, Greg Bruce, Kaylie Roth



Left to right: Tami Hutson, Raquel Perez, Resty McDonald, Sarah Koe-hler, Liz Harness, Nicole Duesdieker, Lacey Chontal, April Gallaher



Gary Gross and Erica Warren



Schapters VNACs, left to right: Sarah Starr, Haley Pate, Jenny Crane, Teghan Lee, Kelsey Miller, Shelby Hilgenbrinck

Veterans' Home at Quincy



(left to right): Front row: Antoinette Sanders, Sharon Glenn, Shunda Everett, Krystal Ivy Back row: Margie Heiles, Anjelica Wheeler, Sharianna Parker



Hammond Hall VNACs: left to right: Front row: Michelle Voth, Kristen Westerheide, Megan Rainbolt, Jaime Bock, Tiffany Ellis, Kathy Wright, Regan DeVerger, Brooke Thomas Back row: Jauna Byrd (dark blue shirt), Toni Bernard, Stormi Schultz, Jennifer Whitaker, Lorri Booth, Rachel Dinklage, Heather McDermott

Monthly Highlights

PTSD Awareness Month

Did you know nearly 13 million Americans are estimated to have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)? Because of the increasing amount of people suffering from PTSD over the years and the severity of the disorder, June has been recognized as PTSD Awareness Month by the United States Senate. This decision was made to bring awareness and information to citizens about what it is and what support and care they, or a loved one, can receive if they need it.

According to a 2022 article by the Mayo Clinic, PTSD, better known as PTSD, is a mental and behavioral disorder caused by one or more traumatic events. Anyone at any age can develop PTSD. Although symptoms vary, some include avoiding reminders of an event, flashbacks, anxiety, and emotional/physical reactions. These symptoms can sometimes appear immediately after the traumatic event or appear months or years later.

Many types of traumas could cause someone to develop PTSD. For service members, being in war and combat creates stressors due to life-threatening situations, which brings the risk of developing PTSD. Some may develop PTSD due to violence and abuse, which can range from sexual assault, domestic abuse, and experiencing sexual or violent abuse as a child. Disasters, whether natural or man-made, lead to loss, fear, and injuries that create traumatic events for communities and individuals.

Some individuals are more susceptible to PTSD compared to others. An example of this, unfortunately, is our veterans who have bravely served our nation. Many of them are quietly suffering from the effects of PTSD. For veterans, PTSD can cause unemployment, difficulty in creating relationships, homelessness, and even suicide. By spreading PTSD awareness and providing resources, we can make sure our veterans' sacrifices are honored by giving them the treatment and care they deserve.

PTSD is a major health problem plaguing our society today. PTSD Awareness month, along with many programs and services, are designed to inform and help individuals get the treatment and information they need. If you or someone you know is experiencing symptoms related to PTSD, there are several services you can call to get help such as 988, 911, or the nearest emergency room. To learn more about PTSD, visit www.ptsd.va.gov.



Monthly Highlights



Women Veterans Day

On June 12, 1948, President Harry S. Truman signed into law the Women's Armed Services Integration Act, marking the official integration of women to serve as permanent and regular Armed Forces members, although women's participation dates back to the Civil War. Since 2018, we have celebrated its anniversary with ceremonies and programs to commemorate the contributions of women in protecting our nation's freedoms and those around the globe.

IDVA honors all women who have served at home and abroad and are grateful for their essential role in preserving our nation's freedoms and those around the globe. We are also grateful for women veterans who have chosen to work at IDVA and continue their service by supporting Illinois veterans.

To learn more about IDVA's Women Veterans Program, contact Margo Watson, Women Veterans Coordinator at margo.watson@illinois.gov or visit [IDVA's website here](#).



Juneteenth

Every year on the 19th of June, the United States celebrates Juneteenth. As one of the longest-running African American holidays, Juneteenth is meant to commemorate the day when the last of enslaved people were freed by federal troops in 1865, two years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation.

President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, which ordered all enslaved people to be free from the Confederate states; however, because the proclamation only applied to certain areas of the country, many enslaved individuals did not find themselves free yet. One prime example was Texas, where slavery continued without any opposition from federal troops. This lasted for two years until General Granger arrived in Galveston in the spring of 1865 to order the rest of Texas's enslaved people to be freed. Celebrations came soon after, as free African Americans finally had their freedom after years of slavery and suffering.

In 1866, Juneteenth became an unofficial holiday by freedmen and was celebrated with music, prayers, food, and other services. Texas was the first state to make Juneteenth an official holiday but it was not considered a federal holiday until President Joe Biden signed it into law on June 17, 2021. The day of Juneteenth also marks a milestone for the U.S. military, as it was a driving force in helping enslaved people get their freedom – a trait represented as one of the core values of our country. Before Juneteenth, the Union Army allowed enslaved people a chance to join the Army, with many veteran African Americans faithfully serving the Union Army. We honor and thank the brave men and women who made sacrifices for our nation.

Monthly Highlights



D-Day

The 80th anniversary of D-Day is an important milestone as we honor the remaining veterans of this invasion. President Biden and President Macron paid tribute to the brave men who were able to join them on the beaches of Normandy and recognized the significance of this historic day.

June 6, 1944, will forever be integral in the trajectory of the world when the United States, United Kingdom, and other Allied countries invaded the beaches at Normandy, France. As one of the most important battles against the Axis powers, Operations Overlord and Neptune and nearly

160,000 troops arrived by sea and air to liberate western Europe from Nazi control. It is known as the greatest amphibious landing and one of the most important battles in history.

Originally, Operation Overlord was to occur on June 5, 1944; however, due to complications with weather conditions, the operation was pushed back by 24 hours. Appointed commander of Operation Overlord, General Dwight Eisenhower ordered the operation to commence on June 6, once his meteorologist predicted that weather conditions would improve the next day. There were already thousands of Allied air troops going behind enemy lines and blocking off bridges and roads. American, as well as British and Canadian troops, managed to secure beaches despite facing heavy resistance at Omaha Beach. A few days later, on June 11, all invaded beaches were fully secured, with many more troops, equipment, vehicles, and other supplies arriving. Because of the scale of the invasion and Hitler's absence to permit generals to order reinforcements, Germany faced confusion and heavy resistance from the Allies. By the end of August 1944, the Allies had overpowered the Germans by pushing them out of northwestern France and liberating Paris, ending the Battle of Normandy.

IDVA pays tribute to honor the brave veterans and the fallen, who stormed the beaches of Normandy. Their sacrifices, courage, and determination to bring the war to an end, will never be forgotten and forever inspire us and future generations to come.

Do you have a Compliment, Recommendation, Question, or Complaint?

Illinois Veterans Accountability Unit (VAU)

Let us Know!

If you are an Illinois veteran or other Illinois resident who seeks services from the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA); a resident of any Illinois Veterans' Home; a family member of a resident, a visitor of any Illinois Veterans' Home; a vendor and/or contractor of the IDVA; or staff of the IDVA, we want to hear from you.

This office welcomes feedback about the services being provided to the veterans of Illinois. If you received exceptional service or have concerns about poor performance involving any member of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, please let us know.

Email us at

IDVA.accountability@illinois.gov

or Call our Toll-Free Helpline

1-855-660-7011

More information about the VAU can be found on the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs website

<https://veterans.illinois.gov/>

The VAU maintains the confidentiality of investigations, complainants, and witnesses to the maximum extent allowable, but must disclose complaints to the Office of the Executive Inspector General (OEIG).

You can obtain more information about the OEIG or file a complaint with the OEIG directly through its website at <https://oeig.illinois.gov/>.



**ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF
VETERANS AFFAIRS**



Field Services

Field Services welcomes new members of its team, as part of its ongoing commitment to hiring more Veteran Service Officers throughout the state, to meet the veteran where they are and be more accessible and available.

Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs Welcomes Veteran Service Officer

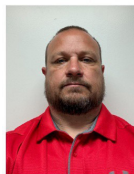


Christopher Garrett
U.S. Army veteran

Christopher Garrett joins IDVA as a Veteran Service Officer serving the Cook County (Elk Grove) office. His 22-year military career includes 1st Sergeant, Platoon Sergeant and Maintenance Supervisor duties for various Army installations statewide and overseas. He was deployed in the Gulf War, 1990 - 91; Bosnian War, 1995 - 96; and Iraq War 2003 - 04 and 2007 - 09. He attended Virginia State University, Chicago State University, and Thomas Edison State University. He is a member of the Moody Church in Chicago, IL. He enjoys photography, fitness training, and sports. He has two daughters and resides in Rockford, IL.



Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs Welcomes Veteran Service Officer



Martin Holtz
U.S. Army, Illinois National Guard, and AGR veteran

Martin Holtz joins IDVA as a Veteran Service Officer serving the Crawford County (Robinson) office. His 31-year military career includes 20 years of Active Federal Service. He retired Sergeant First Class from Active Guard Reserve from the Illinois Army National Guard. He served as a Battalion S1, Unit Readiness NCO, training NCO, and supply Sergeant on AGR. He was deployed to Iraq as a Combat Engineer Platoon Sergeant from 2005 to 2006. He is completing his bachelor's degree at Eastern Illinois University. He enjoys spending time with his family, working on his farm, fishing, hunting, and gardening.



Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs Welcomes Intern at the Marion Office



Maya Shelby
Illinois Air National Guard and Senior Airman

Maya Shelby joins IDVA as a Michael Curry Intern at the Marion Office. Maya is currently a Senior Airman serving in the Illinois Air National Guard. Maya is currently a Personnelist in the Illinois Air National Guard who has spent four years with the 182nd Airlift Wing and is completing her first enlistment with the 12th ARW. Maya earned her bachelor's degree from Illinois State University and is working towards her Juris Doctorate from Southern Illinois University School of Law to pursue becoming a JAG and would like to practice family or contractual law. She enjoys baking in her free time.



Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs Welcomes Veteran Service Officer



Steve Stroup
101st Airborne Division and U.S. Army

Steve Stroup joins IDVA as a Veteran Service Officer serving the St. Clair County (E. St. Louis) office. His 24-year Army career includes the 101st Airborne Division in Fort, Campbell; logistics, transportation, engineering, and recruiting. His military assignments included Korea, Germany, Iraq, and multiple stateside posts. He was an ROTC instructor at Capital University and previously served the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, Department of Corrections, and the Illinois Department of Employment Security. He earned his bachelor's degree from Columbia University in Missouri. He enjoys hiking, motorcycles, history, and animal rescue and relocation. He is married with one child, six pets, and resides in O'Fallon.



★ ★ ★ ★ ★ In the Field

Veteran Service Officers represent IDVA at resource events across the state to educate veterans about the services IDVA offers. IDVA's new logo and look are on full display.



Central Region Supervisor Robert Iverson III and Veteran Service Officer Cynthia McKee (Chicago) are open for business at the Broadview Juneteenth event.



Veteran Service Officer Gerald Enriquez and Director Terry Prince attended the Heroes, Hogs, and Hotrods event hosted by Project Headspace and Timing in Manteno, IL. Gerald participated in the Mental Health Resource Fair.



Veteran Service Officer Michele Richards (Chicago) attends the 2024 Army Reserve Event at 18960 S. Halsted in Homewood, IL.



Veteran Service Officer Walter Wilson participates in the VFW Veteran Resource Fair in Deerfield.



Veteran Service Officers Michele Hansen Hoback (Bloomington) and Diane Moncrief (Champaign) attended the Veterans Resource Fair hosted by Representative Nikki Budzinski and participated in the Women Veterans Panel at Parkland College in Champaign, Illinois.



Veteran Service Officer Shynae Murphy and VA Communications Specialist Outreach Coordinator Lisa Mendez attended the Veteran's Health Fair.



Veteran Service Officer Tina Paggi (Freeport) with Ray Richmond from the Winnebago County Veterans' Assistance Commission (VAC) discuss the PACT Act at the Region 4 International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace, and Agricultural Implementation Workers of America (UAW) Veteran's Affairs Conference.

The Veterans' Home at Chicago is Hiring

The Veterans' Home at Chicago hosted a job fair to recruit registered nurses, nursing assistants, dietary, and other positions. Qualified candidates applied for positions on-site, and IDVA looks forward to continuing to recruit, hire, and train qualified medical professionals and staff. These efforts will support efforts to open the Home's doors to more veterans. Congratulations to the Human Resources Team for a successful event. If you are interested in serving those who served at the new, state-of-the-art Home, [click here](#) to learn about job openings and its amazing benefits.



Left to right: Director Terry Prince, IDVA Human Resources Director Beatris Gonzales, and , Hiring Resource Team Lead Allison Stadtman

Flightless Honor Flight

On Wednesday, June 12th, ten veterans from the Veterans' Home at Quincy attended a Flightless Honor Flight held in Lippincott Hall. The event was sponsored by Land of Lincoln Honor Flight and supported by Quincy's Great River Honor Flight. The virtual program included a video which highlighted memorials that are visited during an Honor Flight to Washington DC. The Flight Crew shared interesting facts about each stop, including video footage of the changing of the guard and retrieving the colors at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery. The program concluded with mail call, refreshments, a gift bag for each veteran and a welcome home celebration when they returned to their home building. We look forward to the next Flightless Honor Flight.

Congratulations to our veterans who attended the Flightless Honor Flight:

Richard Hatfield, Vietnam Army veteran
Lonnie Wagner, Iraq/Afghanistan Army veteran
David Self, Vietnam Air Force veteran
Bill Starkey, Vietnam Army veteran
Brad Centola, Vietnam Army veteran
Donnie McQueen, Vietnam Marine Corps veteran
Billy Yochum, Korean Navy veteran
David Reid, Vietnam Navy veteran
Michael Hildebrand, Vietnam Army veteran
Vern Reich, Peacetime Army veteran



left to right: Billy Yochum, Michael Hildebrand, Brad Centola, David Reid, David Self, Bill Starkey, Lonnie Wagner, Vernon Reich, Richard Hatfield, Donnie McQueen

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Veterans' Homes



Veterans Enjoy a Spin on Recumbent Bikes

Competition is heating up at the Veterans' Home at Manteno with a recumbent bike race. Two units are participating in the mile-long race course. The losing team will host a party for the victors. The veterans are enjoying the bikes so much that the home is ordering additional bikes to accommodate the growing wait list! All are welcome to join in the fun.

Veterans visit the Heroes, Hogs, and Hotrods event in Manteno

Several residents of the Veterans' Home at Manteno attended the Heroes, Hogs, and Hotrods event hosted by Project Headspace and Timing in Manteno, IL. As part of the event, the town's street poles are lined with service pictures of veterans including, Manteno's Bruce Mettlock, who is pictured under his and his father's service pictures, and Leroy Schweitzer pictured under his service picture. The community festival celebrates veterans with a variety of family-friendly activities. Attractions included a car, bike, and golf cart show, where Bruce was a judge, a bean bag tournament, an Air Force simulator, a strongman competition, and a BBQ competition. Live music, food trucks, craft vendors, and a mental health & community resource fair were also offered.



Residents of the Veterans' Home at Chicago Enjoyed an Outing to the Chicago History Museum



Residents left to right: Keith Mounia, Ken Wallace, Donald Duncan, Thomas Riesterer

Staff left to right: (A.T.) Julia Moreno, (Activity aide) Celene Hernandez, VNAC Mini Thomas, SW Cheyanne Haney, Nurse Edgar Acosta



Prince Home at Manteno

The Prince Home, located on the campus of the Veterans' Home at Manteno, may be small, but its program transforms the lives of Illinois' veteran homeless population. It opened in 2007 with the goal of providing supportive services for transitioning homeless Illinois veterans who may have experienced challenges including Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome and substance abuse.

The home provides a full range of programs to its residents to encourage their success, such as group counseling and connections with community partners that assist with finance, veteran's benefits, and employment opportunities. Residents may also enjoy cooking events, dine-outs, group trips to the theater, movies, and community events. The intent is to help the residents work and interact with the community to help their transition as they gradually re-enter the community.

The Prince Home houses up to 15 residents with a furnished room and a shared bathroom. The rooms are wheelchair accessible to accommodate veterans with disabilities. A common area offers a large seating area for group activities, and meetings, a fitness area, and computers. Residents can gather in outdoor areas, including an atrium, a firepit, and a garden with a vegetable patch.

Susan Peters recently graduated from the program after gaining employment and purchasing her first home. Susan shares her story:

"I have achieved much during my time at the Prince home. I've developed skills to deal with my anger; I can move through grief in a healthy way, I treat others better, and I handle my finances responsibly. In fact, I'm on the verge of buying my first house!

Having a home of my very own starts a new chapter in my life and new responsibilities. I'm excited, nervous, happy, anxious and ready.

I found a house in an area in which I'm familiar and it is near the stores I shop. It has most of the things I was looking for. I hope to build good relationships with my new neighbors and make some new friends.

I believe that the next chapter of my life is coming to fruition due to the help I've received at Prince Home. I thank the staff and my fellow veterans for the health and advice I've had during my stay at Prince home this is not goodbye but see you later."

"Ms. Peters is a prime example of the great work that is done by both the residents and the staff at the Prince Home," said Margo Watson, IDVA Senior Program Manager and Women Veterans Coordinator. "Her hard work, dedication, and resilience are a true testament to herself and the greatness of this program. Let us all wish her the very best on her next journey!"

Our mission at the IDVA is very simple. To serve those who have served. In doing so, we serve not only the men and women who have worn the uniform, but also their families. It is our privilege to be able to help our veterans receive the benefits they have earned through service to our nation. Our goal is to empower our veterans and their families to thrive in all aspects of their lives.

We know there are many veterans within our great state who do not require any assistance – but we still want to encourage you to "Stand Up and Be Counted!" by registering with your local VSO. In doing so, you're helping IDVA to do a better job of planning for services, seeking federal funding and understanding the needs of our veteran communities statewide. [Click here to register.](#)

We thank you for your service and for your sacrifice and we at the IDVA look forward to offering our services to you.



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