



State of Illinois
Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs

Illinois Discharged Servicemember Task Force 2013 Annual Report

TO THE GOVERNOR AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With an estimated 764,203 military veterans, Illinois proudly boasts the tenth largest veteran population in the country, representing 3.3 percent of the national veteran population.¹ Illinois is also home to numerous military facilities, including Naval Station Great Lakes, Scott Air Force Base, and the Rock Island Depot.

The Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs (IDVA) continues to work diligently to assist, empower, and honor our state's military heroes, their families, and their survivors. IDVA empowers our veterans and their families to thrive by assisting them in obtaining the benefits to which they are entitled, by providing long-term health care for eligible veterans, and by partnering with other organizations to help veterans overcome obstacles related to employment, housing, mental health, education, and other challenges. This service is performed not just as an expression of gratitude but also as recognition that thriving veterans are tremendous resources for Illinois' economy and communities.

Illinois has long been a national leader in the endeavor to support and honor those who have served our nation, and we have made great strides in serving our heroes even better during 2013. While most veterans in the state - both young and old - lead healthy, fulfilling lives upon return to civilian life, some do need additional support and guidance. Indeed, a significant number of our younger and aging veterans are confronting formidable obstacles, including an economy with limited job openings, a struggling housing market, and the residual health effects of combat.

Pursuant to Public Act 95-294, effective August 20, 2007, IDVA created the Illinois Discharged Servicemember Task Force (Task Force). The mission of the Task Force is to investigate the re-entry process for servicemembers who return to civilian life after being engaged in an active theatre. In order to accomplish this mission, the Task Force convenes a team of experienced, professional veteran advocates and community leaders to analyze major issue areas and develop strategic policy recommendations.

This year's report includes an overview of and corresponding policy recommendations in four critical issue areas as identified by the Task Force: employment, education, homelessness and housing, and post-traumatic stress. While recommendations vary for each area of concern, two crucial underlying themes surface throughout the report:

- There is a need for greater mutual awareness and collaboration among Illinois' veteran- and military-serving organizations - including government agencies, non-profit organizations, and corporate entities - in order to facilitate best practice sharing, build capacity, and optimize outreach and service delivery to veterans and their families.
- Veteran advocates and groups need to initiate further dialogue and build stronger partnerships with organizations conventionally thought to be distinct from the veteran community - particularly community providers that specialize in employment, education, housing, and mental health services for the general populace - in order to identify opportunities to leverage existing resources and programs in support of veterans and their families.

¹ National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, "Veteran Population," U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, retrieved on June 5, 2013, from www.va.gov/vetdata/veteran_population.asp.



TASK FORCE MEMBERSHIP

The Task Force includes representatives from various federal and state agencies, veteran service organizations, and not-for-profit service providers. At its quarterly meetings, the Task Force also benefited from the participation of numerous subject matter experts from academia, government, non-profit organizations, and private entities.

As of the date of this report, the Task Force is comprised of the following members:

- A representative of the Department of Veterans' Affairs, who shall chair the committee;

Rodrigo Garcia, Assistant Director, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs

- A representative from the Department of Military Affairs;

Eric Murray, Service Member and Family Support Services Branch Chief, Illinois Department of Military Affairs

- A representative from the Office of the Illinois Attorney General;

Grant Swinger, Military and Veterans Rights Bureau Chief, Office of the Illinois Attorney General

- A member of the General Assembly appointed by the Speaker of the House;

Representative Linda Chapa LaVia, State Representative, 83rd District

- A member of the General Assembly appointed by the House Minority Leader;

Representative Wayne Rosenthal, State Representative, 98th District

- A member of the General Assembly appointed by the President of the Senate;

Senator Dan Kotowski, State Senator, 3rd District

- A member of the General Assembly appointed by the Senate Minority Leader;

Senator Pamela Althoff, State Senator, 32nd District

- 4 members chosen by the Department of Veterans' Affairs, who shall represent statewide veterans' organizations or veterans' homeless shelters;

Mark W. Bowman, Sergeant Major, Illinois National Guard

Kevin Hull, Chair, Military Affairs Subcommittee, Union League Club Chicago

Kenneth Clarke, President & Chief Executive Officer, Pritzker Military Library

Alison Ruble, President & Chief Executive Officer, United Service Organizations of Illinois

- One member appointed by the Lieutenant Governor; and

Jim Frazier, Gold Star Father and Survivor Outreach Services Officer, U.S. Army

- A representative of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs shall be invited to participate.

Mary Ann Romeo, MSSW, VISN 12 Care Coordinator, U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs

Duane Honeycutt, Chicago VBA Regional Office Director, U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs

EMPLOYMENT

Veteran Unemployment Statistics at the National Level

Research consistently demonstrates that veterans, and particularly the newest generation of veterans who served in Iraq, Afghanistan, or both (Post-9/11 veterans), face greater challenges in finding employment than their non-veteran peers. In November 2011, the jobless rate for veterans at large was 12.1 percent, compared to 9 percent for the general population. For veterans between the ages of 18 to 24, the jobless rate was a staggering 30.4 percent.²

Over the last year, veterans' employment prospects have improved. As of December 2012, the national jobless rate for all veterans was 7 percent - compared to 7.8 percent for the general population - and the jobless rate for Post-9/11 veterans fell to 10.8 percent.³

Nevertheless, joblessness among young veterans remains disproportionately high and well above the national average. As the Services downsize and as the conflicts of the last 12 years wind down, the employment landscape will become even more competitive, with more than 300,000 servicemembers projected to leave the military each of the next four years.⁴

Veteran Unemployment Statistics in Illinois

Though the State of Illinois has made great strides alleviating veteran employment needs, thousands of veterans continue to struggle to find a family-supporting job, to find a job befitting their skills and experience, and to establish a stable, long-term career path. In 2010, the jobless rate for Post-9/11 veterans in Illinois was 13 percent, fourth highest of all states.⁵ By the end of 2011, the situation significantly improved: the jobless rate for Post-9/11 veterans in Illinois fell to 9.5 percent, and among all veterans, the jobless rate was 8.1 percent, compared to 8.3 percent nationally.⁶

² Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Employment Situation of Veterans Summary," United States Department of Labor, March 20, 2012, retrieved on January 7, 2013, from www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.nr0.htm.

³ Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Table A-5. Employment status of the civilian population 18 years and over by veteran status, period of service, and sex, not seasonally adjusted," United States Department of Labor, retrieved on January 7, 2013, from www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t05.htm.

⁴ Zoroya, Gregg, "Veterans' jobless rate falls but remains high," USA Today, January 6, 2013, retrieved on January 7, 2013, from www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/01/06/vets-jobless-rate-drops/1812667/.

⁵ Social IMPACT Research Center, "New Veterans in Illinois: A Call to Action," Social IMPACT Research Center at Heartland Alliance, December 2012, retrieved on January 7, 2013, from www.scribd.com/doc/114787439/New-Veterans-in-Illinois-A-CALL-TO-ACTION.

⁶ Illinois Department of Employment Security, "Monthly Employment Situation for Veterans," Illinois Department of Employment Security, January 4, 2013, retrieved on January 7, 2013, from www.ides.illinois.gov/Custom/Library/Statistic/LAUS/VetsReport/VetReport_Jan13.pdf.

While Illinois' jobless rates have decreased in recent years, and while there are numerous inspirational stories of veterans succeeding and rising to leadership positions in their communities, further analysis illustrates that more work needs to be done to help veterans obtain employment that provides a livable, family-supporting wage and befits their skill level. Among Post-9/11 veterans in Illinois, 33 percent earn less than \$20,000 annually, 46 percent earn less than \$30,000 annually, and 69 percent earn less than \$50,000 annually. On top of that, 12 percent are low-income, living between 100 percent and 200 percent of the poverty line, and 7 percent live below the poverty line, which equates to \$11,170 annually for a single person and \$19,090 for a family of three.⁷

Lack of Training and Education for Returning Servicemembers

Despite the availability of education benefits offered to Illinois veterans, a large number are hampered by a lack of training and civilian job experience necessary to excel in today's competitive job market. Only 22 percent of Post-9/11 veteran in Illinois have a college degree. The vast majority (67 percent) only have a high school diploma or equivalency, which makes it difficult to compete for high-demand professional positions.⁸ Consequently, as noted above, many young veterans are underemployed, living paycheck to paycheck, poverty-stricken, or dependent upon other family members to meet their financial needs.

Accordingly, IDVA recently partnered with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), educational institutions, and employers to establish a number of educational training programs that provide veterans with the skills and qualifications needed to transition into particular career fields. Programs are available in a variety of specialized work areas, including utilities, information technology, building operations, and at Illinois State Parks. These train-to-hire programs focus on equipping veterans with hands-on experience, certifications, and job placement assistance that will lead to direct employment and long-term career stability.

Translation of Military Skills to the Civilian Job Sector

Many young veterans gain job skills during their service that can be leveraged to transition into a civilian occupation. The majority of Post-9/11 veterans in Illinois have military experience in at least one of the following areas: logistics, infantry, support or medical.⁹ This experience can be translated to marketable civilian job skills, but in many instances, this conversion is not completely obvious to employers or even to the veterans themselves. Further complicating the matter is the fact that skills translation differs in each employment sector (i.e. medical, manufacturing, law enforcement, etc.); thus the solutions must be tailored to fit each specific skills-employment area.

⁷ Social IMPACT Research Center, "New Veterans in Illinois: A Call to Action," Social IMPACT Research Center at Heartland Alliance, December 2012, retrieved on January 7, 2013, from www.scribd.com/doc/114787439/New-Veterans-in-Illinois-A-CALL-TO-ACTION.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

IDVA is taking steps to advance military-to-civilian skills translation in two specific high-priority areas: (1) articulation of military credit in schools and (2) state licensing. For the former, IDVA is partnering with educational institutions to identify career fields for which documented military training can be translated into college credit. For the latter, IDVA helped pass legislation (Senate Bill 275) last session that allows for the reward of state licensure credit when military experience is deemed to be substantially similar to licensure prerequisites. In addition, IDVA is leading the implementation of Executive Order #13-02, working with state licensing agencies to standardize programmatic procedures for the translation of relevant military experience toward state licensure requirements (e.g. military medics' experience counted toward LPN or EMT licensure requirements).

Matching Employers with Job-Seeking Veterans / Targeted Hiring Fairs

In repeated instances, veterans need assistance with job searching, placement, and readiness. Though there are a plethora of job search/placement service providers both online and in local communities, the sheer volume is often unnavigable and overwhelming, and veterans are left frustrated and/or unaware of support services available to them. At the same time, employers are often unable to locate and recruit veteran talent for open positions.

Illinois Job Link

IDVA is thus actively partnering with the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) to build awareness of Illinois Job Link (IJL), which functions as a comprehensive central database featuring current job openings at the state and national level. Through IJL, veterans can (1) navigate an extensive database of job opportunities, (2) make direct connections with major employers looking to hire veterans, and (3) access job placement assistance from IDES's veteran employment representatives.

Illinois Joining Forces (IJF)

A critically important part of the effort to match employers with job-seeking veterans is to develop a one-stop-shop through which servicemembers, veterans, and family members can access assistance more readily. This is the central undertaking of Illinois Joining Forces (IJF), a newly launched joint effort led by IDVA and the Illinois Department of Military Affairs (IDMA) that brings together the numerous veteran-serving organizations in the state under one collaborative framework. IJF member organizations work together in ten different Working Groups, including an Employment and Job Training Working Group comprising 40 government agencies, non-profit organizations, and private companies; this Working Group seeks to identify, marshal and streamline available resources to enhance the delivery of employment services to veterans and their families. Furthermore, in the coming year, the Working Group will work toward developing and executing a wide-reaching action plan that will close gaps in current employment services, producing a best practices guide, and generating policy recommendations aimed at creating preventive, long-term solutions to veteran employment issues.



Targeted Hiring Fairs

IDVA is increasing its involvement in hiring fairs, informational training seminars, and similar events aimed at matching veterans with employers and helping veterans access training programs that can strengthen their career prospects. Working with other state agencies and partners, IDVA is aggressively integrating the “smart job fair model,” which emphasizes and encourages the use of targeted hiring fairs. Unlike traditional job fairs, which put an assortment of job-seekers in interaction with a conglomeration of employers from varying industry sectors, targeted hiring fairs are industry- or employer-specific, and the job-seekers are screened and registered beforehand to ensure they have the skills needed to fill the job orders. In addition, targeted hiring fairs for veterans place an emphasis on job application training (administered beforehand through workshops and webinars), DD214 renovation for civilian positions, and onsite interviews, all of which help maximize impact and effectiveness.

Two of IDVA’s veteran employment initiatives - Mission: Military 2 Manufacturing and Mission: Veterans 2 Entrepreneurs - utilize informational seminars and the smart, targeted hiring fair model to give veterans a site to (1) make connections with employers, (2) network with industry experts, associations, peers and colleagues, and (3) better understand how they can use their educational benefits to transition into a manufacturing training program or entrepreneurial venture.

Women Veterans - Entrepreneurship

Nationally, women veterans are struggling with employment issues in greater proportions than their male counterparts. In December 2012, the national jobless rate among women veterans was 9.1 percent, compared to 6.8 percent among male veterans.¹⁰

In an effort to stem high unemployment among women veterans, IDVA partnered with the Women’s Business Development Center to create a first-of-its-kind Women’s Vetpreneurship Program (WVP), a new initiative that serves women veterans who are considering business ownership as a path towards economic security, independence, and empowerment. The program includes entrepreneurial training, technical assistance, business counseling, direct lending, and business mentoring, as well as critical social, veteran benefits, and other support services offered and arranged through IDVA, collaborating partners, and veteran service organizations. It is anticipated the program will serve over 30 women during year one of operation and provide participants with the business and financial acumen necessary to own and operate a sustainable business or increase the capacity of an existing firm.

¹⁰ Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Table A-5. Employment status of the civilian population 18 years and over by veteran status, period of service, and sex, not seasonally adjusted,” United States Department of Labor, retrieved on January 7, 2013, from www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t05.htm.

Tracking of Veteran-Owned Businesses in Illinois

Under current state policy, when a veteran-owned business registers its operation with the Illinois Secretary of State (e.g. submits its articles of incorporation), the registration process does not include the option for an applicant to self-identify as a veteran-owned business. Instead, a veteran-owned business must separately register with Illinois' Central Management Services (CMS), which is statutorily responsible for finding and certifying veteran-owned businesses and implementing the state's 3 percent goal of state contracting to veteran-owned businesses.

Veteran Hiring at Illinois State Agencies

There are several issues at play regarding the hiring of veterans at Illinois state agencies. First, a system of information sharing between CMS and other state agencies - i.e. IDVA, IDES and DCEO - has not been established to track the number and percentage of veterans hired by the state. Also, an information sharing system has not been established to ascertain the number of veterans hired under veteran preference policies. As a result, state agencies do not have a measurement mechanism in place to determine how successful the state is in hiring veterans and giving preference as stipulated in state statutes.

Secondly, though state agencies are obligated to give preference points to veterans in the hiring process, agencies do not have established veteran employment plans in place to specify benchmarks, recruitment practices, and support services for the hiring and retention of veteran employees. Accordingly, agencies are not held to hiring benchmarks for veterans as they are for other key target demographics (e.g. minority groups), and a number of human resources managers are unaware of best practices regarding hiring and retention services for veterans.

On a related note, there is concern that veteran applicants are not consistently given full credit (points) for their relevant military experience and skills. Consequently, veteran applicants may be entering positions significantly below their experience level, or they might be denied for positions for which they are in fact qualified.

Availability of Workforce Investment Act Funds to Support Veteran Employment

Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership

The City of Chicago and Cook County recently formed a non-profit partnership organization, the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership (CCWF), to assist residents of Chicago and suburban Cook County with employment training, placement and educational opportunities. The organization is supported by \$10 million in Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funding. Though veteran employment services are a policy priority at the local level, there is uncertainty as to how the funding will be distributed and to what extent veteran employment programs will be enhanced.

Governors' 15 Percent Set-Aside in Discretionary Funds

WIA provides discretionary funding to each state to support statewide employment and training activities. The funding is distributed at the discretion of each state's governor, and in many instances, it is dedicated to support at-risk populations, including dislocated workers, children, disabled persons, and veterans. In the fiscal year 2011-2012 federal budget, the set-aside was reduced from 15 percent to 5 percent, and consequently, many states, including Illinois, are struggling to maintain critical workforce development initiatives.¹¹ As a result, specialized grants and career readiness services for veterans have been cut back in numerous states.

Recruitment, Retention and Support Resources in the Private Sector

Private sector human resources managers are often unprepared to address challenges unique to veteran job-seekers and employees, including issues related to mental or physical disabilities, civilian work adjustments, and other retention and support issues. Some hiring managers and human resources staff may also hold negative misperceptions about veteran employees, or they may not be fully aware of the benefits associated with hiring veterans.

In response to this issue, IDES has hosted workshops for recruiters and human resources staff to address misperceptions, illustrate the benefits of hiring veterans, and provide guidance pertaining to retention and support issues. These IDES workshops are available upon request.

In addition, IDES and IDVA jointly launched the Illinois Hires Heroes Consortium in 2012, which seeks to operationalize the term "veteran-friendly." The Illinois Hires Heroes Consortium is a group of Illinois employers who recognize the great value veterans bring to the workplace by committing to implement a series of military veteran recruitment, training, and retention practices. Members of the Consortium are Illinois employers commit to the implementation of at least three initiatives - one in each aforementioned human resource category. An initiative of Governor Pat Quinn, the Consortium seeks to mobilize public attention and employer commitment to addressing the issue of veteran employment. Consortium members also benefit from hiring some of the most dedicated and skilled employees our nation has to offer.

¹¹ National Governors Association, "States' Use of Workforce Investment Act Set-Aside Funding for Statewide Activities," National Governors Association, January 5, 2012, retrieved on January 8, 2013, www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/1201WIABRIEF.PDF.

Employment Policy Recommendations

Based on the challenges and information outlined in the issue overview section, the Task Force proposes the following policy recommendations:

1. Expand the Capacity of Train-to-Hire Programs - To equip returning servicemembers with the skills and qualifications they need to successfully transition into a civilian occupation, the Task Force recommends that specialized educational training programs - such as the Utility Worker Program, Illinois State Parks Program, IT Program, and Building Operator Certification Program - be expanded and further promoted amongst schools, employers, and workforce development groups to enable more veterans to participate and acquire the skills necessary for career development.

2. Organize More Targeted Hiring Fairs/Industry-Specific Seminars - To match job-seeking veterans with employers and better prepare veterans for jobs in today's growing employment sectors, the Task Force recommends that more targeted hiring fairs and industry-specific informational seminars be organized and coordinated across the state. This includes the events organized under the Mission: Military 2 Manufacturing (MM2M) and Mission: Veterans 2 Entrepreneurs (MV2E) initiatives. For example, in light of the extensive interest in and support for the MM2M blended workshop/hiring fair events, the Task Force recommends that additional resources be committed to (1) mapping MM2M event demand across Illinois, (2) preparing logistical and staffing support for future MM2M event planning, and (3) incorporating additional MM2M sponsors and collaborators including relevant industry associations, workforce development organizations, and private manufacturing firms.

3. Track Veteran-Owned Businesses with the State of Illinois - To better measure the extension and effectiveness of benefits provided to certified veteran-owned businesses in the state, the Task Force recommends that IDVA work with the Illinois Secretary of State to establish a mechanism to identify and track veteran-owned businesses that register and/or incorporate in the State of Illinois. This change could be achieved by adding an identifying question/step in the initial incorporation filing process.

4. Track Veteran Hires at State Agencies by Establishing an Information Sharing System between CMS and IDVA - To measure how effective the state is in hiring veterans and complying with veteran preference hiring regulations, the Task Force recommends that an information sharing system or mechanism be established between CMS and IDVA. The final product should identify and track the number and percentage of veterans hired with individual state agencies.

5. Establish Veteran Employment Plans within Illinois State Agencies - To increase the employment of qualified veterans with the State of Illinois and ensure that veteran state employees have access to adequate retention and support services, the Task Force recommends that state agencies establish and implement a Veteran Employment Plan that stipulates (1) hiring benchmarks (e.g. 5 percent), (2) outlines recruitment best practices, and (3) formalizes the development of retention and support services.



6. Review CMS Grading Procedures to Ensure Crediting of Military Experience - To ensure that veteran job applicants are being given full and proper credit for their military experience and skills when being considered for state positions, the Task Force recommends that a review of CMS's grading system be conducted.

7. Collaborate with the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership to Direct Workforce Investment Act Funding to Veteran Employment Services - To ensure that the newly formed Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership (CCWP) will allocate Working Investment Act funding to enhance veteran employment and job training services in the region, the Task Force recommends that a dialogue be initiated with the CCWP Board and/or the CCWP Chief Executive Officer.

8. Urge the Federal Government to Restore the 15 Percent Set-Aside for Governors - To maintain the availability of targeted grants and employment support services for veterans in Illinois, the Task Force recommends that a statement be drafted and sent to relevant federal lawmakers urging them to restore the 15 percent Workforce Investment Act set-aside funding for statewide employment and job training programs.

9. Provide Workshops and Navigator Resources to Private Sector Human Resources Managers on Veteran Recruitment, Retention and Support Services - To assist human resources managers in administering effective recruitment, retention and support services for veteran job-seekers and veteran employees, the Task Force recommends that IDES, IDVA, DCEO, and other relevant private and not-for-profit organizations collaborate to provide additional training workshops to hiring managers and human resources staff in the private sector.

10. Partnerships for Information and Data Sharing of Veteran Statistics in Illinois* - To better understand the skills and demographics of veterans filing for unemployment in Illinois, the Task Force will work regularly with IDES to understand what data is publicly available and what further data could be made available in accordance with privacy laws so IDES, employers, and workforce development non-profits can better collaborate to address the problem.

11. Explore Legislation that Recognizes Veterans as Members of Diverse Populations for Public Works Projects* - To assist transitioning veterans who have experience in construction and other projects, the Task Force recommends that lawmakers in Illinois consider legislation that requires public works contractors and sub-contractors to employ veterans for a certain number of hours, or as a percentage of each job.

* All policy recommendations suggested for inclusion by IJF Working Groups do not imply endorsement of the recommendation by every Working Group member, but rather endorsement of the recommendation and approval by majority vote of the Working Group.

EDUCATION

Veteran Education Benefits at the National Level

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has a long history of providing education benefits for veterans. Over the last several years, spurred by the homecoming of a new generation of veterans - those who served in Iraq, Afghanistan or both (Post-9/11 veterans) - education benefits for veterans and their families have grown.

In July of 2008, the Post-9/11 GI Bill was signed into law. This monumental piece of legislation expands the benefits provided by the Montgomery GI Bill and rivals the WWII-Era GI Bill of Rights in terms of educational benefits. The Post 9/11 GI Bill, which took effect on August 1, 2009, provides financial support for education and housing to individuals with at least 90 days of aggregate service after September 10, 2001, or individuals discharged with a service-connected disability after 30 days. The program pays tuition and fees on behalf of veterans or eligible dependents directly to the school in which they are enrolled. Eligible participants also receive a monthly housing allowance and up to \$1,000 annually for books and supplies. Approved training under the Post-9/11 GI Bill includes graduate and undergraduate degrees, vocational/technical training, flight training, correspondence training, licensing and national testing programs, entrepreneurship training, and tutorial assistance.

Since the Post-9/11 GI Bill was implemented in 2009, VA has provided educational benefits to 773,000 veterans and their family members, amounting to more than \$20 billion in benefits.¹²

While the Post-9/11 GI Bill is by far the largest education program used by today's veterans, there are a variety of additional programs that the VA provides to eligible veterans, servicemembers, and their dependents. In addition to the prior GI Bill programs such as the Montgomery GI Bill for Active Duty and Selected Reserve, the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Program is available to assist veterans with service-connected disabilities prepare for, find, and retain suitable employment. Available VR&E services include vocational counseling, job-training, resume development, and post-secondary training at educational institutions. Additionally, unemployed veterans between the ages of 35 and 60 may be eligible for the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP), which offers up to 12 months of training assistance for programs of education that lead to high-demand occupations identified by the U.S. Department of Labor.

Finally, through GI Bill transferability and the Spouse and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program (DEA), the VA provides education benefit programs for veterans' survivors and dependents.

¹² U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs, "VA and the Post-9/11 GI Bill," U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, retrieved on April 23, 2013, from www.va.gov/opa/issues/post_911_gibill.asp.



Supplemental Veteran Education Benefits Provided by the State of Illinois

The State of Illinois provides a variety of supplemental and specialized education programs for veterans, including the widely used Illinois Veterans Grant (IVG). IVG is a state benefit program that pays tuition and mandatory fees for student veterans that meet residency and service requirements. It was established as a supplemental benefit program to augment existing VA benefits and further enable Illinois veterans to complete a four-year degree or go back to school for re-training at a public college or university. From 2008 to 2012, the state furnished 52,854 IVG awards, amounting to over \$66 million in benefits.¹³

Illinois also provides the Illinois National Guard Grant (ING) - similar to IVG - to eligible Guard members. In addition, through the MIA/POW Scholarship, the Children of Veterans Scholarship, and Educational Opportunities for Children, Illinois offers benefit programs for certain veterans' dependents.

Education Attainment of Post-9/11 Veterans in Illinois

Despite the availability of education benefits offered to Illinois veterans and returning servicemembers, a large number are encumbered by a lack of training and civilian job experience necessary to excel in today's highly competitive job market. Only 22 percent of Post-9/11 veterans in Illinois possess a college degree. The vast majority (67 percent) have only attained a high school diploma or educational equivalent, which makes it very difficult to compete for high-demand positions.¹⁴ Consequently, a number of returning servicemembers face joblessness, underemployment, poverty, or dependency on family members' to meet basic financial needs.

That being the case, IDVA has partnered with a variety of relevant stakeholders, including universities, colleges, private educational institutions, non-profit organizations, and other government agencies to identify and implement strategic policy initiatives that empower veterans to succeed in their educational pursuits.

Making Military Experience Count toward Professional Licensing Standards

Many young veterans obtain education and training during their service that can be utilized to satisfy requirements for state professional licensing standards. The majority of Post-9/11 veterans in Illinois possess military experience in at least one of the following areas: logistics, infantry, support or medical.¹⁵ This experience can be applied to professional licensing standards but in many instances this pathway is not clear. Often, there are gaps between military training and licensing requirements. Further complicating the matter is the fact that military programs of instruction and military occupational codes (MOCs) differ depending on

¹³ Illinois Student Assistance Commission, "2012 Data Book," Illinois Student Assistance Commission, retrieved on April 23, 2013, from <https://www.isac.org/rppa/data-book/2012-data-book.html>.

¹⁴ Social IMPACT Research Center, "New Veterans in Illinois: A Call to Action," Social IMPACT Research Center at Heartland Alliance, December 2012, retrieved on January 7, 2013, from <http://www.scribd.com/doc/114787439/New-Veterans-in-Illinois-A-CALL-TO-ACTION>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

branch of service, service period, and rank; thus, identifying linkages between licensing requirements necessitates detailed analysis and individual matching between MOCs and specific licenses.

- **Executive Order #13-02 to Apply Military Training to Professional Licensing Standards**

IDVA and other state agencies are actively developing policies and procedures through which military experience can be applied toward professional licensing standards. In the 2012 legislative session, Senate Bill 275 was passed (now Public Act 097-0710) to allow for the award of state licensure credit when military experience is deemed to be substantially similar to licensure requirements. Recognizing that there is not a process or mechanism in place that assists state agencies in implementing this Act, Governor Quinn issued Executive Order #13-02 on February 6, 2013, to establish a statewide mechanism and process for determining how training and education acquired by servicemembers during service in the military may be applied towards requirements for state licensure in certain civilian fields. EO #13-02 tasks all state licensing agencies to assist in identifying gaps between, on the one hand, military education and training that is potentially relevant to a civilian field for which licensure is required, and, on the other hand, state licensure requirements in that field. Identifying such gaps will enable educational institutions to design programs (for subsequent approval by the relevant state licensing agency), through which servicemembers may obtain any additional training and education necessary to obtain state licensure in the relevant field.¹⁶

As the agency designated to lead and coordinate implementation of EO #13-02, IDVA has assembled a working group of agency representatives to (1) produce a consolidated and prioritized list of state licenses that have a corresponding or relevant military career field, (2) assess the gap between military training and state license requirements or the required additional information to assess that gap, and (3) publish information pertaining to that gap on the IDVA website.

Progress in this effort has been strongest for military medical fields. In January of 2012, the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation's (IDFPR) Board of Nursing formally approved a recommended bridge curriculum for Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) for former military medics, thereby laying the groundwork for a college or university to launch a certified veteran bridge program; IDVA is currently working to identify an educational institution that has the capacity to stand up the bridge program. In regard to Emergency Medical Technicians, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) has determined that military medics are qualified to be Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) and are exempt from training if they submit proof of completing a hospital corpsman or medical service specialist training; when veterans demonstrate proof of military training, they then need only to have a skills check-off and take the written competency exam.

¹⁶ Quinn, Pat, Governor of Illinois, "Executive Order Applying Relevant Military Education and Training Obtained by Illinois Service Members to Professional Licensing Standards," State of Illinois, February 6, 2013, retrieved on April 23, 2013, from www.illinois.gov/government/execorders/pages/2013_2.aspx.

Making Military Experience Count toward More Credit on Campus

Many veterans have received training and coursework instruction during their military service that is relevant to their course of study and can earn them academic credit at colleges, universities, and other training establishments. However, similar to the above-mentioned issue regarding professional licensing standards, the application of military training toward degree requirements is often unclear. In many cases, educational institutions do not have assessment policies and procedures in place that allow for student veterans to receive full or appropriate credit for relevant military training.

- **American Council on Education (ACE) Credit Recommendations**

The American Council on Education (ACE) has established a guide to the evaluation of educational experiences in the military. The ACE Military Guide presents credit recommendations for formal courses and occupational specialties offered by all branches of the military. All credit recommendations are based on ACE assessments conducted by college and university faculty members who are actively teaching in the areas they review.¹⁷

Public and private educational institutions across the country have incorporated ACE credit recommendations into their credit transfer policies, thereby allowing student veterans to earn academic credit for relevant military instruction. According to ACE, more than 2,000 higher education institutions consider ACE credit recommendations for transfer to degree programs.¹⁸

Policymakers in Minnesota have gone so far as to require that Minnesota State Colleges and Universities review military academic transcripts and allocate credit based on ACE recommendations.¹⁹ Students are then notified via an audit report as to what was accepted in the transfer.

In Illinois, a number of higher education institutions have raised concerns about the rigor of ACE recommendations. Some are worried that there may be instances in which student veterans receive credit for curriculum that was not covered, for hours that were not obtained, or for coursework that was not taught by a credentialed instructor.

To address this issue, IDVA and the Illinois Joining Forces (IJF) Education Working Group actively collaborated with ACE staff to educate school officials as to the merit of ACE credit recommendations. In

¹⁷ American Council on Education, "College Credit for Military Service," American Council on Education, retrieved on April 30, 2013, from www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/Military-Guide-Online.aspx.

¹⁸ American Council on Education, "The ACE CREDIT College and University Network," American Council on Education, retrieved on May 3, 2013, from www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/The-ACE-CREDIT%20AE-College-and-University-Network.aspx.

¹⁹ The Office of the Revisor of the Statutes, "2012 Minnesota Statutes: 197.775 Higher Education Fairness," State of Minnesota, retrieved on May 3, 2013, from www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=197.775.

April of 2013, IJF and ACE co-hosted two informational seminars for school transfer specialists and administrative leaders in order to clearly illustrate the process by which ACE evaluates military training and applies it toward relevant academic programs. Participants reiterated that these seminars were very effective in demonstrating the rigor and accuracy of ACE's methods and generating greater buy-in from the academic community.

- **Online Credit Transfer Portal for Student Veterans and Schools**

For those educational institutions in Illinois that have relevant credit transfer processes in place, student veterans are often unaware of these credit-earning opportunities. Consequently, they move forward with important academic and financial decisions without full knowledge as to how they can leverage their military experience effectively and make best use of their veteran education benefits.

Through the Working Group's Military Training Counts initiative, IDVA is partnering with educational organizations, including the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), and u.select Illinois as well as selected institutions of higher education to work toward use of an online portal that contains clear information as to relevant military-to-academic credit transfers. u.select Illinois, jointly sponsored by IBHE and ICCB, has been identified as a likely site for this initiative; u.select is the central online portal through which the majority of Illinois colleges and universities post and coordinate transfer credit between institutions.

The goal is to create a highly accessible, user-friendly tool by which student veterans can see how their prior military experience counts toward degree requirements at different educational institutions in Illinois. This will better equip veterans to choose a college program suited to their prior learning, interests, and financial status. u.select would also serve as a resource for educational institutions, providing a central coordination point through which military credit assessments can be shared.

Illinois Veterans' Grant (IVG)

As outlined above, the Illinois Veterans Grant (IVG) is a State of Illinois benefit program that pays tuition and mandatory fees for eligible student veterans. It was established as a supplemental benefit program to augment existing VA benefits and further enable Illinois veterans to complete a four-year degree or go back to school for retraining. The benefit is limited to use only at Illinois public universities or community colleges.

While some have argued for the elimination of IVG given the advent of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, it should be noted that IVG was established as a supplemental benefit program. IVG benefits are particularly important to members of the Reserve and other servicemembers who are not 100 percent eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill. In addition, veterans lose eligibility for Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits after 15 years from their release from active duty. Consensus within the Illinois veteran community is that IVG meets a vital need and it represents a smart, targeted investment toward ensuring veterans thrive in Illinois communities and companies.



Training for VA Certifying Officials at Educational Institutions

VA certifying officials are the designated representatives within higher educational institutions and training establishments responsible for completing all procedures and documentation necessary to certify the enrollment (and changes in enrollment) for students eligible for VA benefits. Working in conjunction with the VA and State Approving Agencies, certifying officials perform a vital function in ensuring that eligible veterans and their dependents receive VA education benefits.

Under current policy, educational institutions are required to submit a form to the VA verifying that their designated certifying officials are qualified to perform the assigned duties and responsibilities. The form also requires educational institutions to acknowledge that new certifying officials must successfully complete online training prior to being granted access to VA's certification system.

New certifying officials do receive preliminary online training; however, with the addition of the Post-9/11 GI Bill and other recent changes to veterans' education benefits, eligibility requirements and admissions processes have grown substantially more complex. A number of veteran-serving organizations have raised concerns that current training requirements are insufficient to ensure that GI Bill programs are well-administered and veterans are well-served on campuses.

While the VA offers annual training seminars and a variety of free materials online, certifying officials are not required to receive any additional instruction or adhere to any specific training benchmarks. Much of this stems from the fact that certifying officials are employees of the educational institution, with the VA thus limited in its ability to impose standardized training requirements.

A number of veteran organizations emphasize that schools have a vested interest in ensuring that certifying officials are properly trained and fully capable of maximizing veteran enrollment. In fiscal year 2011 alone, the VA disbursed \$301 million in education and vocational rehabilitation/employment benefits in Illinois, with a substantial portion of that funding going directly to educational institutions.²⁰ While much of this funding is used to cover expenses associated with tuition and fees, educational institutions are compensated based on a per pupil rate for administrative costs associated with the certification of beneficiaries of VA benefits. Many veteran organizations advocate that this funding should be directed to enhance training processes. It is noted, however, that educational institutions across the nation are struggling during austere economic times and would find it challenging to implement new training processes without additional financial or administrative support.

²⁰ National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, "FY12 Summary of Expenditures by State," U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, retrieved on May 3, 2013, from www.va.gov/VETDATA/docs/GDX/GDX_FY11.xls.

Break Pay

In the first iteration of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, eligible student veterans received their basic housing allowance between semesters, quarters, or terms. These payments were referred to as break pay (or interval pay). Under the second (and current) iteration of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, the VA no longer issues break pay under any education benefit program unless under an Executive Order of the President or due to an emergency, such as a natural disaster or strike. So under current law, for example, if the semester ends on December 15, the housing stipend is only provided for the first 15 days of the month. The benefits would begin again when the new semester commences (e.g. January 15).

Veteran organizations and student veteran groups have raised concerns that the loss of break pay has brought financial hardship to thousands of veterans across the nation. They emphasize that a veteran who was receiving \$1,200 monthly, for example, now only receives \$600, which in many cases does not cover the costs of rent, utility bills, and other basic necessities. Veteran organizations continue to advocate that break pay needs to be restored in order to ensure that student veterans have adequate financial assistance necessary to succeed in their academic pursuits.

90/10 Rule: Limit on Federal Revenue Received by For-Profit Schools

The 90/10 Rule limits to 90 percent the proportion of revenues that for-profit colleges and universities schools can obtain from federal financial aid (under Title IV). Accordingly, for-profit schools must receive at least 10 percent of their revenues from other sources, which could include cash payments from students, private student loans, and/or state educational grants. Schools that do not comply with the 90/10 Rule risk losing eligibility to participate in federal student aid programs.

Under current law, revenue derived from the federal government through the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which falls under Title X, is exempted from the 90/10 Rule. A number of veteran advocates emphasize that this has created a loophole through which questionable educational institutions poach and exploit Post-9/11 veterans. There are reported instances in which educational institutions have used unscrupulous recruiting practices designed to attract student veterans while misleading them as to the quality or credentials of the training establishment.²¹

In response to these reports, federal and state officials have taken action to crack down on improper recruiting practices and help ensure student veterans have access to reliable information. The U.S. Department of Education's College Affordability and Transparency Center recently released the College Scorecard to help student veterans find out more about a school's affordability and value so they can make more informed decisions. Additionally, a Presidential Executive Order issued in August of 2012 established the Principles of Excellence Program, which establishes guidelines for schools that serve veterans, servicemembers, and their

²¹ The Office of the Press Secretary, "We Can't Wait: President Obama Takes Action to Stop Deceptive and Misleading Practices by Educational Institutions that Target Veterans, Service Members and their Families," The White House, April 26, 2012, retrieved on May 3, 2013, from www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/04/26/we-can-t-wait-president-obama-takes-action-stop-deceptive-and-misleading.



dependents. Through the program, schools that receive federal funding are classified in terms of their adherence to certain guidelines (i.e. providing educational plans for all military and veteran education beneficiaries, agreeing to end fraudulent and aggressive recruiting practices, etc.). Student veterans and prospective students can then easily search for schools that have been admitted into the Principles of Excellence Program. At the state level, the VA, via IDVA, has tasked the Illinois State Approving Agency to actively evaluate educational institutions in order to ensure compliance.

Education Policy Recommendations

Based on the challenges and information outlined in the issue overview section, the Task Force proposes the following policy recommendations:

1. Support Executive Order #13-02 to Standardize Processes within State Agencies for the Translation of Military Experience toward Licensing Standards - To ensure that state licensing agencies have processes in place by which veterans may receive credit toward professional licensing standards for prior military training, the Task Force endorses the efforts related to Executive Order #13-02 and further recommends that state licensing agencies develop administrative policies to formalize these processes.

2. Educate School Officials as to the Merit of American Council of Education (ACE) Transfer Credit Recommendations - To encourage more educational institutions to provide veterans with appropriate academic credit for prior learning received during military service, the Task Force recommends that additional resources be dedicated to educate school officials about ACE evaluation processes and credit recommendations and other relevant forms of prior learning assessment. Options include training workshops and/or direct correspondence.

3. Establish an Online Portal for Student Veterans to Ascertain How Prior Military Training Counts toward Academic Credit - To give student veterans a tool through which they can understand how their prior military experience counts toward degree requirements at different educational institutions in Illinois, the Task Force recommends the use of a centralized, user-friendly online portal. The iTransfer website, already in use in Illinois, has been identified as a likely site for this mechanism.

4. Educate Illinois State and Federal Legislators on American Council of Education (ACE) Transfer Credit Recommendations - To increase the understanding of college credit for prior learning, the Task Force recommends that the value of prior learning assessment, with a focus on ACE credit recommendations, be reinforced with state and federal legislators.

5. Reaffirm the Importance of the Illinois Veterans' Grant amongst Illinois State Legislators - To strengthen and build support for the Illinois Veterans' Grant to ensure its continuation for current and future generations of Illinois veterans, the Task Force recommends that the value of the Illinois Veterans' Grant be reiterated to Illinois state legislators, urging that they dedicate state funding to reinforce its solvency.

6. Establish Basic Training Requirements for VA Certifying Officials and Veteran Coordinators; Assist Educational Institutions in Administering New Training Processes - To ensure that VA certifying officials and Veteran Coordinators at educational institutions are properly trained and fully able to assist veterans and their dependents in utilizing VA education benefits, the Task Force recommends that basic training benchmarks be required either through standards set forth by the VA or through administrative policies implemented at the institutional level. Furthermore, in order to aid educational institutions in establishing new training processes for certifying officials, the Task Force recommends that veteran-serving organizations, including IDVA and the VA, provide feedback and provide individual institutions with assistance in implementation.

7. Urge the Illinois Congressional Delegation to Restore Break Pay - To ensure that student veterans obtain adequate financial assistance necessary to succeed in their academic pursuits, the Task Force recommends that the Illinois Congressional Delegation be engaged on the topic of how the elimination of break pay has negatively impacted student veterans and their families.

8. Urge the Illinois Congressional Delegation to Eliminate the Exemption of the Post-9/11 GI Bill from the 90/10 Rule - To ensure that for-profit educational institutions are not excessively targeting veterans for enrollment, and to counteract dubious marketing practices aimed at recruiting student veterans, the Task Force recommends that the Illinois Congressional Delegation be urged to eliminate the exemption of the Post-9/11 GI Bill from the 90/10 Rule.

9. Initiate Discussions with the Illinois Board of Higher Education and the Illinois Community College Board* - To foster greater mutual awareness, garner feedback from subject matter experts, and spur the development of new education policies and programs designed to assist veterans and their families, the Task Force recommends that veteran organizations initiate renewed discussions with key coordinating boards, including the Illinois Board of Higher Education and the Illinois Community College Board. In addition, the Task Force recommends that veteran organizations reach out to these coordinating boards in seeking input and determining implementation plans for the above-mentioned policy recommendations.

* All policy recommendations suggested for inclusion by IJF Working Groups do not imply endorsement of the recommendation by every Working Group member, but rather endorsement of the recommendation and approval by majority vote of the Working Group.

Veteran Homelessness at the National Level

Though the VA estimates that homelessness among veterans has decreased by 17.2 percent since 2009, homelessness continues to be a major issue within the veteran community.²² Per a point-in-time analysis completed in 2012, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) estimates that 62,619 veterans are homeless on any given night.²³ The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV) emphasizes that approximately twice that many experience homelessness over the course of a year - and though only 7 percent of the general population can claim veteran status, nearly 13 percent of the homeless adult population are veterans.²⁴ Other social service organizations, such as Volunteers of America (VOA), stress that the number is higher. VOA asserts that more than 150,000 veterans are homeless on any given night, and nearly twice as many experience homelessness at some point during the year.²⁵ VOA further emphasizes that one in every three men living on the streets is a veteran. Analysts point out that statistics fluctuate largely due to the transient nature of homeless populations.

Though total counts vary, it is clear that homelessness is disproportionately higher in the veteran community. Further, NCHV emphasizes that approximately 1.4 million other veterans are considered at risk of homelessness due to poverty, lack of support networks, and dismal living conditions in overcrowded or substandard housing.²⁶

In terms of identifying the demographic characteristics of veterans who are homeless, NCHV indicates that:

- 92% are male;
- 50% are age 51 or older;
- 35% are African American, though African Americans only account for 10.4% of the U.S. veteran population;
- 5.1% are Latino, though Latinos only account for 3.4% of the U.S. veteran population;
- 68% reside in principal cities;
- 32% reside in suburban or rural areas;
- 70% have substance abuse problems;
- 51% have disabilities; and
- 50% have a serious mental illness.²⁷

Although men represent 92 percent of homeless veterans, women veterans represent the fastest growing demographic in the homeless veteran community. Of the 141,000 veterans nationwide who spend at least one

²² Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs, "Homeless Veterans," U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, retrieved on May 28, 2013, from www.va.gov/homeless/about_the_initiative.asp#three.

²³ Kravitz, Jason, "HUD Reports Slight Decline in Homelessness in 2012," U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, December 10, 2012, retrieved on May 28, 2013 from http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/press/press_releases_media_advisories/2012/HUDNo.12-191.

²⁴ National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, "Background & Statistics," National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, retrieved on May 28, 2013, from http://nchv.org/index.php/news/media/background_and_statistics/.

²⁵ Volunteers of America, "Veterans," Volunteers of America, retrieved on May 28, 2013, from www.voaindiana.org/Services/Homeless-Veterans/.

²⁶ National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, "Background & Statistics," National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, retrieved on May 28, 2013, from http://nchv.org/index.php/news/media/background_and_statistics/.

²⁷ Ibid.

night in a shelter in 2011, nearly 10 percent were women, up from 7.5 percent in 2009.²⁸ Analysts note that this change is due in part to the changing composition of the military, where women now represent 14 percent of active-duty forces and 18 percent of the Army National Guard and the Reserves.²⁹ With this increase, homeless and housing groups, as well as veteran organizations, face additional challenges in adjusting available services to accommodate the needs of women veterans (who often have dependent children). This includes providing enhanced services in areas such as child care, reproductive health, Military Sexual Trauma, and other issues faced by women veterans.

Under the leadership of Secretary Eric Shinseki, the VA has made a concerted effort to reduce and eliminate veteran homelessness. In 2009, Secretary Shinseki announced the goal of ending veteran homelessness by 2015. Since then, the VA has increased funding to expand homeless outreach and prevention programs, provide health care to homeless veterans, and build out an extensive integrated network of homeless programs in partnership with non-profits, faith-based organizations, and government agencies at the state and local level. In fiscal year 2013, the VA will dedicate \$1.4 billion to specialized homeless programs and \$4.4 billion to health care for veterans who are homeless.³⁰

Veteran Homelessness in the State of Illinois

In recent years, the State of Illinois has made significant progress in alleviating issues related to veteran homelessness. In 2008, analysts indicated that the number of chronically homeless veterans in Illinois was approximately 9,000 to 10,000.³¹ Today, IDVA estimates that approximately 1,100 Illinois veterans are on the streets on any given night.³²

This is largely due to that fact that new partnerships have been created among service providers in the public, private, and non-profit sectors. Service providers are also doing a better job of keeping younger veterans off the streets because of the community supports in place during their discharge. More recently, Illinois has witnessed a 30% decrease in veterans experiencing homelessness from January 2010 to January 2011. Statistics relating to short-time homelessness among Illinois veterans are also encouraging, with recent studies indicating that 85% of veterans exit homelessness in under three months and 61% exit in less than one month.³³

Nevertheless, 13 percent of the homeless population in the state can claim veteran status, though only 6 percent of the general population are veterans.³⁴ On top of the fact that homelessness is disproportionately higher in the veteran community, a sizeable number of Illinois' 76,000 new (Post-9/11) veterans are struggling

²⁸ Brown, Patricia Leigh, "Female Veterans Face Limbo in Lives on the Street," *The New York Times*, February 27, 2013, retrieved on May 28, 2013, from www.nytimes.com/2013/02/28/us/female-veterans-face-limbo-in-lives-on-the-street.html?pagewanted=all&r=0.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs, "Homeless Veterans," U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, retrieved on May 28, 2013, from www.va.gov/homeless/about_the_initiative.asp#three.

³¹ Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs, "2012 Discharged Servicemember Task Force Annual Report," Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs, July 1, 2012.

³² Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs, "Illinois Veterans: Demographics, Challenges, & Strengths," Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs, May 23, 2013.

³³ Army OneSource, "Veterans in Illinois Experiencing Homelessness," Army OneSource.

³⁴ Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs, "Illinois Veterans: Demographics, Challenges, & Strengths," Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs, May 23, 2013.



with transition challenges related to employment, job training, post-traumatic stress, and combat-related injuries. These challenges can lead to financial and housing difficulties, which put them at risk of homelessness. Recent studies indicate that 7 percent of new veterans in Illinois (5,320 veterans) live below the poverty line and 12 percent (9,120 veterans) are low-income, living between 100% and 200% of the poverty line.³⁵ Accordingly, veteran homelessness may be a growing risk in coming years.

To address remaining challenges, IDVA is actively collaborating with partners and supporters in the non-profit, private, and public sectors to implement preventive strategies and ensure that veterans and their families have ready access to high-quality, affordable housing. With the launch of IJF in November of 2012, IDVA has brought together subject matter experts and leading housing organizations to form the IJF Working Group on Homelessness and Housing. The Working Group serves as a collaborative vehicle through which leaders in the veteran and housing communities can facilitate innovative linkages between service providers, increase access to housing resources for veterans and their families, and develop actionable policy recommendations for lawmakers and agency heads. IDVA also administers the Veterans Cash program to provide targeted grants to eligible service providers that are spearheading housing and homelessness initiatives in the veteran community. In addition, IDVA continues to provide housing and supportive services for homeless Illinois veterans through the Prince Home for the Homeless and Disabled at Manteno. At the Prince Home, a 15-veteran program, residents have access to broad, wraparound services that help them cope with an array of associated challenges.

Tracking of Homeless Veterans and Service Providers in the State

Although the State of Illinois has made great strides in reducing veteran homelessness in recent years, data tracking continues to be a challenge. HUD compiles a broad array of data on homelessness through the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), which is a class of database applications used to aggregate data and reports on homeless populations served across the country. However, housing experts note that HMIS is not designed to measure homelessness among veterans. Researchers working in collaboration with the National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans are working to develop new analytical methodologies to accurately measure the prevalence and disposition of homelessness in the veteran community. In the meantime, researchers emphasize that no definitive study currently exists and additional data sources are needed.³⁶

Subject matter experts also note that there is a need to create a comprehensive directory that lists and maps available service providers for homeless veterans, including community shelters, faith-based facilities, medical centers, veteran agencies, and other pertinent sites. In Illinois, no statewide directory currently exists. The IJF Homelessness and Housing Working Group is exploring options to remedy this problem.

³⁵ Social IMPACT Research Center, "New Veterans in Illinois: A Call to Action," Social IMPACT Research Center at Heartland Alliance, December 2012, retrieved on January 7, 2013, from www.scribd.com/doc/114787439/New-Veterans-in-Illinois-A-CALL-TO-ACTION.

³⁶ Byrne, Thomas, "Prevalence and Risk of Homelessness Among U.S. Veterans: A Multisite Investigation," National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans, August 25, 2011, retrieved on May 31, 2013, from http://www.endveteranhomelessness.org/sites/default/files/research/3A1c%20VAMH_Multi_site_8_25_11_0.pdf.

HUD-VASH Vouchers

A number of subject matter experts attribute the recent drop in homelessness among veterans to the expansion of the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program. The HUD-VASH program provides local public housing authorities with funding to provide rental assistance to veterans who are homeless. At the same time, participating veterans receive case management and clinical services through the VA at local medical centers (VAMCs) and community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs). The program includes both the rental assistance that the voucher provides and the comprehensive case management that VA facilities provide. VAMCs and CBOCs work closely with homeless veterans, referring them to public housing authorities for HUD-VASH vouchers.

HUD-VASH vouchers are awarded based on geographic need and public housing authority administrative performance. Since 2008, a total of 48,385 vouchers have been granted, and federal officials estimate that over 42,000 formerly homeless veterans are currently housed because of the HUD-VASH program.³⁷

In May of 2013, federal officials announced the first round of HUD-VASH funding for 2013, which totals \$60 million. Officials estimate that this funding will assist approximately 9,000 veterans in obtaining permanent housing. In Illinois, 265 vouchers (representing \$2.1 million in funding) will be allocated to housing agencies in Chicago, Champaign, Woodstock, and Waukegan.³⁸

While HUD-VASH vouchers have played a significant role in reducing the number of homeless veterans, veteran advocates are concerned with the durability of the program, and questions have been raised as to its effectiveness in counteracting chronic homelessness. Advocates underscore the fact that HUD-VASH vouchers predominantly take the form of tenant-based rental assistance distributed in a Scattered-Site Model. Under this framework, program participants receive financial assistance to pay the rent, and public housing authorities place participants in low-density units scattered throughout diverse, middle-class neighborhoods. This model is designed to prevent the concentration of poverty in high-density projects, but because program participants are widely dispersed across a geographic area, they often do not have sufficient access to the full range of support and case management services needed to achieve self-sufficiency and maintain permanent housing.

In light of these issues, some veteran advocates emphasize that more HUD-VASH vouchers should be project-based. Under this alternate framework, public housing authorities - with the support of the partner VAMC - may request that vouchers be allocated for specific rehabilitated or newly constructed housing units. The units are concentrated in a single site where intensive wraparound services are easily accessed, a strong peer culture is fostered, and service providers have more oversight to ensure that veterans are using the voucher to successfully transition out of homelessness.

³⁷ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "HUD & VA Team Up to Provide Permanent Homes to 9,000 Homeless Vets," U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, May 29, 2013, retrieved on May 29, 2013, from portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=%2Fpress%2Fpress_releases_media_advisories%2F2013%2FHUDNo.13-082.

³⁸ Ibid.



Currently the St. Leo Campus for Veterans in Chicago is the only site in Illinois that receives project-based vouchers. Its supporters emphasize that the residential facility features an innovative integration of services in a structured environment marked by the camaraderie of fellow veterans. Residents have access to outpatient medical and employment programs operated by the VA, job search/placement services from the U.S. Department of Labor, and counseling from the Veterans Resource Center, among other forms of assistance. Because this model is proactive in helping veterans overcome the barriers that contribute to chronic homelessness - including assisting them with obstacles related to employment, post-traumatic stress, substance abuse, financial planning, and legal assistance - a growing number of stakeholder groups are advocating for greater federal support and funding for project-based models for HUD-VASH vouchers.

Preventive and Support Programs at the Federal Level

The VA and HUD administer a variety of programs designed to alleviate specific challenges facing veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness:

- **Services for Veteran Families Program**

The VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program awards grants to non-profit organizations and consumer cooperatives that provide supportive services to very low-income veteran families living in or transitioning to permanent housing. The program is designed to aid at-risk veterans and their families in obtaining services beyond housing. Grantees provide eligible veteran families with comprehensive case management assistance and support in obtaining vital services related to health care, financial planning, legal needs, child care, transportation, and housing counseling. In addition, grantees may provide time-limited payments to third parties, such as landlords, utility companies, moving companies, and child care providers, if these payments are vital to ensure that the veteran family maintains or acquires permanent housing.

Veteran advocates emphasize that SSVF is essential as a prevention strategy and bridge program, providing low-income veteran families with the wraparound services and continuity of care they require to establish a stable home environment, reintegrate into the community, and assume responsibility for their financial and personal well-being.

The VA will be announcing final funding decisions for the upcoming SSVF grant cycle in the summer of 2013.

- **Community Resource and Referral Centers**

The VA is making a concentrated effort to implement prevention strategies and enhance service delivery to homeless veterans through the development of new Community Resource and Referral Centers (CRRCs). CRRCs are one-stop service centers where veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness can connect to the full array of housing and support resources in the area. They are highly integrated,

collaborative facilities, situating service providers from various different arenas in one centralized location so veterans can easily obtain assistance with housing, health care, employment, and other VA and non-VA benefit programs.

As of November 2012, there were 17 CRRCs in various phases of development and operation across the nation.³⁹ In April of 2013, a CRRC was established at the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center in Chicago. The collaborative center is supported by federal, state, and local agencies, as well as by numerous community organizations. To date, over 3,000 contacts have been made, and VA staff reiterate that demand from the local community is high. Accordingly, Chicago CRRC staff encourage other veteran-serving organizations in the area to establish a local office at the center.

- **Emergency Solutions Grants Program**

The Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) program, administered by HUD, is not exclusive to veteran-serving organizations, but veteran advocates emphasize that it represents another important vehicle through which service providers can provide preventive and immediate assistance to veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. ESG provides federal funds to non-profit organizations and local units of government to support a set group of designated activities, including (1) the rehabilitation, renovation, or conversion of buildings for use as emergency shelters, (2) homelessness prevention, including short-term subsidies to defray rent or utility costs for individuals and families, (3) maintenance expenses directly related to the operation of a shelter, and (4) new or expanded essential services, including job training or mental health counseling, among others.

Leaders in the housing community reiterate that ESG is critically important in providing service providers with additional resources to shelter homeless veterans and connect them with needed services. Many housing specialists advocate that additional resources need to be dedicated to ensure the impact and sustainability of this program.

Illinois Housing Development Authority Programs and Services

While housing experts acknowledge that HUD-VASH vouchers have gone a long way toward keeping homeless veterans off the streets, many emphasize that Illinois' at-risk veterans - particularly the youngest generation of veterans - do not necessarily need a rental subsidy as much as they need affordable housing. As noted earlier, a significant number of veterans - both young and old - are struggling to make ends meet in the wake of high unemployment, stagnant wages, and rising costs of living. Therefore, many experts are looking to state and local housing authorities to identify ways to expand their most successful programs and increase high-quality affordable housing for veterans and their families.

³⁹ National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans, "Community Resource and Referral Centers," National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans, retrieved on May 30, 2013, from www.endveteranhomelessness.org/programs/community-resource-referral-centers.

The Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA) functions as a bank with the mission of investing resources from federal and state-funded programs to create and preserve affordable housing across Illinois. IHDA partners with a wide variety of organizations, including lenders, developers, local government agencies, non-profits, and other community groups, to generate low-cost housing opportunities.

- **Low-Income Housing Tax Credit**

Veteran housing specialists emphasize that IHDA oversees a number of important programs that could be augmented and/or tailored to provide additional support to veterans and their families. The first is the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC). Through LIHTC, IHDA allocates federal tax credits to sell to investors to generate private equity for affordable housing developments. This reduces the debt that the developer would otherwise have to borrow, and as a result of the lower debt, a tax credit property can offer lower rents. A number of housing experts reiterate that LIHTC is the single most important vehicle in creating affordable, large-scale housing developments for low-wage earning families. Accordingly, housing leaders in the veteran community emphasize that a set-aside or preference in the program should be established to augment the creation of more housing developments for low-income veterans; it should be noted that IHDA does have a preference for veterans in place, as evidenced in the scoring section of the Qualified Application Plan (QAP). At the same time, experts underscore the fact that LIHTC funding is at risk of being cut, and they stress that funding must be maintained, if not enhanced, to increase the availability of affordable housing in the veteran community.

- **Illinois Housing Trust Fund**

IHDA also oversees the Illinois Housing Trust Fund, which offers resources to developers to buy and rehabilitate existing housing, build new rental developments, and to convert non-residential properties into affordable rental housing. Developments that serve the elderly and individuals with physical or developmental disabilities or other special needs are given preference. The Trust Fund is also used to help eligible first-time homebuyers with down payments, closing cost assistance grants, and forgivable loans. IHDA utilizes this resource to create veterans housing via a program called Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH); IHDA's last application round under the PSH program had a preference for veterans. IHDA also utilizes this resource for a hugely successful home purchase program, Welcome Home Heroes (WHH). WHH offers veterans, active military personnel, reservists, and Illinois National Guard members \$10,000 cash assistance to cover down payment and closing costs, a 30-year fixed rate mortgage with a competitive interest rate, and a federal tax credit up to \$20,000 over the life of the loan. It is IHDA's most lucrative mortgage financing package.

- **Capital Funds**

Governor Quinn is the first governor to allocate state capital funds to affordable housing. Those funds had a preference for veterans housing, and IHDA has utilized a portion to fund veterans housing under the PSH program and Welcome Home Heroes program, both of which are referenced above.

Homelessness Stigma

Housing specialists in the veteran community point out that a significant number of veterans avoid obtaining assistance because of the negative stigma associated with seeking help for homelessness. While there are a number of different barriers that stop or delay veterans from seeking assistance, the negative labels and assumptions associated with homelessness represent a significant obstacle. Alison Lighthall, a Military Behavioral Health Specialist, affirms that “veterans do not see themselves as victims... even when veterans are psychologically struggling or physically wounded, they see themselves as powerful warriors.”⁴⁰ In light of that general reasoning, it becomes clearer why veterans may hesitate or resist seeking assistance.

To address this issue, community experts emphasize that homelessness and housing services need to be re-named, re-branded, and re-packaged in order to marginalize the stigma. For example, housing leaders note that programs should not be designated for “homeless veterans;” they should be framed as helping veterans with temporary financial and housing challenges. Re-framing the issue as such helps veterans overcome this internal struggle, and it helps assure them that there is no shame in seeking assistance to take control of the situation and achieve self-sufficiency.

Homelessness and Housing Challenges Facing Incarcerated Veterans

One distinct population that warrants additional consideration is that of incarcerated veterans, formerly imprisoned veterans, and veterans who come in contact with the criminal justice system. These veterans often face additional challenges in gaining stable employment and qualifying for the full range of benefits available through federal, state, and local programs. These issues build on top of one another, and in a number of cases, they escalate to the point of recidivism or chronic homelessness.

In light of these special challenges, veteran advocates agree that more targeted assistance needs to be concentrated at the point of transition back into the community or, in the case of veterans coming in contact with the criminal justice system, upon the initial intake point. For the latter, Veteran Treatment Courts (VTCs) have emerged as a powerful tool through which justice-involved veterans can obtain the early intervention assistance necessary to restructure and re-stabilize their lives.

VTCs provide separate treatment for veterans and servicemembers in recognition of their extraordinary service and sacrifice.⁴¹ Individuals are evaluated to ascertain the underlying causes of their behaviors and, instead of issuing jail time, judges typically require a strict regimen of treatment and counseling. Afterward, the criminal charges are re-evaluated based on the veteran’s performance in the program. Six jurisdictions are currently established in Illinois, including in the counties of Cook, DuPage, Will, Madison, Lake, and Sinclair; veteran

⁴⁰ Lighthall, Alison, “Ten Things You Should Know About Today’s Student Veteran,” The NEA Higher Education Journal, National Education Association, Fall 2012, retrieved from www.nea.org/home/53407.htm.

⁴¹ Governor’s Task Force on Veterans and Servicemembers Courts, “Implementing Veterans Courts or Programs in the State of Illinois,” retrieved on November 11, 2012, from www.law.siu.edu/news/PDF/Veterans%20Court%20Protocol.pdf.



advocates in the legal community note that additional VTCs are in the process of being created elsewhere in Illinois.

For incarcerated veterans preparing to exit correctional institutions, the VA administers the Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) program and the Health Care for Re-entry Veterans (HCRV) program to provide special supportive services. Via the VJO program, the VA assigns Justice Outreach Specialists to eligible veterans to provide case management assistance and ensure that veterans are utilizing available health care and counseling benefits; in addition, Justice Outreach Specialists work with local legal service providers, such as legal aid organizations, law school clinics, and private firms providing pro bono service, to help veterans get help with civil legal matters like child support, specially adaptive housing, and landlord-tenant issues. The HCRV program is designed to address the re-entry needs of incarcerated veterans, providing outreach and pre-release assessments, as well as referrals to medical, employment, and social services. Veteran proponents emphasize that, like VTCs, these programs are critically important as long-term prevention strategies, providing at-risk veterans with the assistance they need to successfully rejoin the community and avoid chronic homelessness.

Transportation Challenges

Many veteran advocates emphasize that challenges relating to transportation are often overlooked when agencies examine issues associated with homelessness and housing. They point out that community resources may be abundant, but that veterans who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness cannot effectively access these resources if they do not have an affordable transit option available. Indeed, VA staff note that an exceedingly large number of claims are denied because of failure to prosecute when homeless veterans do not have an affordable means to travel to the necessary disability evaluation exam.

In the Chicagoland area, veterans with a disability rating of 10 percent or higher qualify for the Military Service Pass, which enables them to travel for free or reduced fares on Regional Transportation Authority buses and trains. Veteran advocates emphasize that the Military Service Pass, which was established in 2008 per a city ordinance, is an extremely valuable benefit that assists thousands of Chicagoland veterans in meeting their daily transportation needs.⁴²

At the same time, homeless and at-risk veterans in more suburban and rural areas of the state do not have an abundance of affordable transportation options at their disposal. Mass transit infrastructure is far less robust in these regions, leaving many veterans without a ready means to get to medical appointments, veteran service offices, and other service provider sites.

Disabled American Veterans (DAV) administers one of the few transportation programs to fulfill this critical need: the DAV Transportation Network. Largely through a network of vans and volunteer drivers, DAV transports sick and disabled veterans to and from VA hospitals and clinics for medical appointments. The program is administered by DAV Hospital Service Coordinators at the VA's 172 medical centers nationwide.

⁴² City of Chicago Clerk, "Report of Committees," City of Chicago, February 6, 2008, retrieved on May 31, 2013, from http://docs.chicityclerk.com/journal/2008/feb06_2008/feb06_2008_Financeoptimize.pdf.

While this is a vital resource in rural and suburban areas, veteran advocates note that there may be gaps in available DAV service, and it would be beneficial to explore means to build out the DAV model through collaboration with other public, private, and non-profit entities.

HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the challenges and information outlined in the issue overview section, the Task Force proposes the following policy recommendations:

1. Create a Statewide Directory of Veteran-Serving Homelessness and Housing Facilities - To better understand the needs and solutions for homelessness among veterans in Illinois, the Task Force recommends that the IJF Working Group on Homelessness and Housing compile the information necessary to create a statewide directory of veteran-serving homelessness and housing facilities. Once created, the directory should be posted to the IJF website and distributed broadly among the veteran community.

2. Project-Based HUD-VASH Vouchers - To create more high-intensive, group-oriented residential programs, which have demonstrated a high success rate in alleviating chronic homelessness among veterans, the Task Force recommends that federal officials set aside a greater portion of HUD-VASH vouchers for project-based housing initiatives. Concurrently, the Task Force recommends that veteran-serving homelessness and housing organizations, as well as the IJF Working Group on Homelessness and Housing, collaborate with HUD and VA officials to identify new opportunities for project-based sites.

3. Urge Federal Officials to Increase Funding for the Supportive Services for Veterans Families Program - To enhance prevention strategies and strengthen support services targeted to veteran families at risk of homelessness, the Task Force recommends that federal policymakers be urged to increase funding for the Supportive Services for Veterans Families program.

4. Integrate and Centralize Service Delivery at VA Community Resource and Referral Centers - To strengthen collaboration and facilitate capacity-building among veteran-serving organizations (while simultaneously making it easier for homeless and at-risk veterans to connect with the full array of support services available through government and non-profit agencies), the Task Force recommends that veteran-serving organizations in the area establish a local office at the VA Community Resource and Referral Center (CRRC) in Chicago. Concurrently, the Task Force recommends that veteran organizations reach out to the VA to explore additional sites in Illinois where the establishment of a CRRC is needed.

5. Establish a Veteran Housing Set-Aside in the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Program - To increase the availability of affordable housing options in the veteran community and to marginalize risk factors that can result in homelessness, the Task Force recommends that a veteran housing set-aside be established in the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program to allocate additional resources to housing developers that specifically provide low-income veterans and veteran families with access to quality affordable housing.



6. Identify Synergies and Build Stronger Linkages between Veteran and Housing Agencies - To foster greater mutual awareness, facilitate best practice sharing, and spur the development of new housing policies and programs designed to assist veterans and their families, the Task Force recommends that veteran organizations identify and initiate new opportunities for collaboration with public, private, and non-profit entities in Illinois' general (not veteran-specific) housing community, including through regional Continuums of Care. Specifically, the Task Force recommends that IDVA and the IJF Working Group on Homelessness and Housing reach out to staff at the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA) to explore opportunities to leverage the Illinois Housing Trust Fund, the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit, and other IHDA programs to further assist veterans.

7. Re-brand Homelessness and Housing Assistance Programs to Marginalize the Stigma - To marginalize the negative stigma that often delays or precludes veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness from seeking help, the Task Force recommends that service providers re-label, re-brand, and re-frame assistance programs as a tools through which veterans can take control of their lives and overcome temporary financial and housing challenges.

8. Increase Outreach and Support Services to Incarcerated Veterans - To minimize the homelessness and recidivism among incarcerated veterans, formerly imprisoned veterans, and veterans facing criminal charges, the Task Force recommends that enhanced assistance be provided at the point of re-entry, as well as at the point of intake. Specifically, the Task Force recommends that veteran organizations continue to work with partners in the legal community to establish Veteran Treatment Courts in areas of need. In addition, the Task Force recommends that further support and attention be directed to enhance the Veteran Justice Outreach program and the Health Care for Re-entry Veterans program administered by the VA.

9. Collaborate with Local Transit Authorities and Disabled American Veterans to Build Out Transportation Programs - To further ensure that veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness have an affordable means of transit through which they can access available services, the Task Force recommends that veteran organizations identify and work with local transit authorities to advocate for the establishment of transportation programs for homeless, low-income, and disabled veterans. The existing Military Service Pass program administered by the Chicago Transit Authority can serve as a model. In addition, the Task Force recommends that IDVA work with Disabled American Veterans to explore opportunities to build out their Transportation Network in unserved and underserved areas. The Task Force recommends that the IJF Working Group on Access to Transportation assist with implementation on these two fronts.

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS

In an effort to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the issues associated with Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS) and develop recommendations that address associated challenges, the Task Force identified and reviewed a number of high-priority discussion points, including: (1) the prevalence of PTS among veterans, (2) the existence of institutional and perceptual barriers that impede treatment access, (3) the impact of PTS on the family unit, and (4) the need for more positive messaging regarding PTS awareness and services.

The Task Force also recognized that there a variety of broad circumstances that affect decision-making and underscore the need for collaboration among involved stakeholders. These include Illinois' geographic and cultural differences, the location of the state's four Veteran Integrated Service Networks (VISNs), and the size of the state's veteran population (10th largest in the country⁴³).

Prevalence of PTS

An extensive number of returning servicemembers and veterans in Illinois face serious health, behavioral, and transitional issues due to PTS, which is defined as an anxiety disorder that occurs after experiencing a traumatic or life-threatening event (such as combat exposure or seeing others killed or wounded).⁴⁴ The demands of frequent deployments, along with the use of improvised explosive devices in recent conflicts, has increased the number of servicemembers impacted by PTS, as well as by traumatic brain injury (TBI) and other mental health ailments. According to the National Center for PTSD, as many as 20 percent of servicemembers returning from Iraq or Afghanistan report symptoms of PTS or severe depression.⁴⁵ In Illinois, that equates to approximately 15,200 veterans.⁴⁶

Subject matter experts emphasize that, if left untreated, PTS can interfere with work activities, create instability in the home, increase the risk of suicide, and cause a number of other serious health and socio-economic issues. It is thus in the absolute best interests of veterans and their communities to better understand, address, and, whenever possible, prevent issues associated with PTS.

Barriers to Treatment

- **The Care Continuum**

Veteran advocates emphasize that there is a shortage of Tricare and military-knowledgeable service providers in Illinois, especially in the southern region and rural areas of the state. This shortage makes it very difficult for many veterans and their families to access the complete continuum of care advised for PTS recovery, which begins with an assessment, followed by customized recommendations, treatment, and support.

⁴³ United States Department of Veterans Affairs, *Veteran Population*, retrieved on October 30, 2012, from www.va.gov/vetdata/Veteran_Population.asp.

⁴⁴ National Center for PTSD, "What Is PTSD?", United States Department of Veterans Affairs, retrieved on November 10, 2012 from www.ptsd.va.gov/public/pages/what-is-ptsd.asp.

⁴⁵ National Center for PTSD, "How Common is PTSD?", United States Department of Veterans Affairs, retrieved on November 10, 2012, from www.ptsd.va.gov/public/pages/how-common-is-ptsd.asp.

⁴⁶ Social IMPACT Research Center, "New Veterans in Illinois: A Call to Action," Social IMPACT Research Center at Heartland Alliance, December 2012, retrieved on January 7, 2013, from www.scribd.com/doc/114787439/New-Veterans-in-Illinois-A-CALL-TO-ACTION.

Furthermore, pre-existing negative perceptions of the VA are not only damaging, but often untrue and/or vary from facility to facility and from function to function. Some leaders in the veteran community recognize the fact that some veterans associate VA healthcare with long waits between appointments, burdensome paperwork and application requirements, distant referral locations, lack of bedside manner during appointments, lack of reassessment, over/under medication, and various other complications. Founded or not, these negative perceptions can discourage veterans and their families from seeking PTS treatment and represent another significant barrier in improving access to care.

Even as the VA expands mental healthcare capacity, subject matter experts agree access to alternative and additional mental health practitioners is essential. An interconnected network of community-based behavioral health services is critically needed. Relevant community-based service providers include licensed physicians, clinical psychologists, social workers, counselors, board-certified psychiatrists, registered nurses, and recovery support specialists. Training and integrating these mental health practitioners into a unified veteran support network - including by encouraging more to become certified as Tricare Providers - is critical to ensuring that veterans have greater access to PTS recovery services.

- **PTS Stigma**

Medical experts in the veteran community underscore the fact that many veterans avoid seeking care because of the negative stigma associated with PTS. According to a recent study commissioned by the Pentagon, only slightly more than half of returning servicemembers affected by PTS seek treatment.⁴⁷

While there are a number of different barriers that stop or delay veterans from seeking care, the negative labels and stereotypes associated with PTS represent one of the most significant obstacles. Veterans may fear being labeled as “weak” or as “damaged goods,” being denied career opportunities because of a PTS diagnosis, or being judged negatively by family and friends. Because of these concerns, some veterans try to hide the problem and avoid seeking assistance when they need it most.

In light of these barriers, veteran advocates emphasize that a coordinated effort needs to be launched to cognitively reframe and improve the perception of obtaining assistance for behavioral health ailments. Veterans need to recognize that seeking help is a form of courage - and service providers and the media need to help tell this side of the PTS story.

- **Veteran Treatment Courts - Separate Consideration of PTS in the Justice System**

Illinois State Law recognizes that due to the effects of PTS and other service-related ailments, many veterans and returning servicemembers face unique problems re-adjusting to civilian life. As a result, some come in contact with the criminal justice system, largely due to drug or alcohol use. This problem is exacerbated for Iraq and Afghanistan-era veterans who have endured lengthy and repeat deployments.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Terri Tanielian and Lisa Jaycox, *Invisible Wounds of War: Psychological and Cognitive Injuries, Their Consequences, and Services to Assist Recovery*, RAND Corporation, retrieved on November 10, 2012, from www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG720.html.

⁴⁸ Illinois Lawyer Now, “Veterans’ Courts Offer Soldiers a 2nd Chance,” Illinois State Bar Association, retrieved on November 11, 2012, from www.isba.org/sites/default/files/publications/IL%20Lawyer%20Now%20Winter%202011.pdf.

In June of 2010, the Illinois Veterans and Servicemembers Court Treatment Act was signed into law, establishing a legal framework for Veteran Treatment Courts (VTCs). As mentioned earlier, VTCs provide separate treatment for veterans and servicemembers in recognition of their extraordinary service and sacrifice.⁴⁹ Individuals are evaluated to ascertain the underlying causes of their behavior and instead of ordering jail time, judges typically require a strict regimen of treatment and/or counseling. Then the individual and their criminal charges are re-examined based on their performance in the treatment program.

VTCs demonstrate a high success rate, and they act as an important early intervention strategy to help veterans succeed in civilian life. They also save money for counties and the state by keeping prison populations smaller and moving some cases from the typical social services and incarceration systems to an alternate diversion program, making use of federal resources available to veterans through the VA.

Though veteran advocates recognize that Illinois is ahead of many states in addressing these issues - six different counties now have VTCs in operation - veteran leaders in the legal community stress that there is a lot more work to be done. Subject matter experts emphasize that combat-related behaviors are overwhelming a justice system largely unequipped to deal with the toxic combination of PTS and TBI.

That being the case, experts stress that further work needs to be done to ensure the growth and success of VTCs across the state. That includes improving coordination with the Illinois Attorney General's Office and the VA, as well as raising awareness among local officials, circuit courts, defense attorneys, veteran organizations, and other support agencies as to how they can establish VTCs in their communities. Accordingly, the IJF Legal Support Working Group is actively taking steps to bridge these gaps and encourage and enable the launch of new VTCs in strategically identified jurisdictions across the state.

Impact of PTS on the Family Unit

Given the prevalence of PTS among returning servicemembers, veteran advocates are focusing more attention on the associated effects of PTS on the family unit. Research shows that veterans with PTS experience more marital problems and family violence, and their children often exhibit increased behavioral issues.⁵⁰ In addition, PTS symptoms can have a negative influence on family members, including increased occurrences of depression, anxiety, and other emotional issues, which can heighten instability in the household and undermine the prospects for recovery.

In light of these challenges, leaders in the veteran community are reviewing the availability and effectiveness of existing support services for the spouses and children of veterans with PTS. In particular, attention has been focused on the role of spousal support groups (SSGs), which provide targeted assistance to veterans'

⁴⁹ Governor's Task Force on Veterans and Servicemembers Courts, "Implementing Veterans Courts or Programs in the State of Illinois," retrieved on November 11, 2012, from www.law.siu.edu/news/PDF/Veterans%20Court%20Protocol.pdf.

⁵⁰ National Center for PTSD, "Effects of PTSD on Family," retrieved on November 11, 2012, from www.ptsd.va.gov/public/pages/effects-ptsd-family.asp.



spouses, who often seek a group support environment to discuss and work out their shared difficulties. There are also a variety of other support services (i.e. hotlines, counselors, retreats, etc.) available to the families of servicemembers and veterans, including resources provided by the Illinois Warrior Assistance Program, Illinois National Guard Family Program, Military Family Life Consultant program, and other support group services organized by the Red Cross, YMCA Military Outreach, veteran service organizations, and church groups. Behavioral health experts also note that educational institutions at all levels are working to establish support resources for the children of servicemembers. In general, though, more system capacity is needed when it comes to providing counseling and treatment for family members of veterans struggling with PTS.

Positive Messaging on PTS Treatment

Veteran advocates underscore the fact that positive messaging tools need to be developed to reframe negative perceptions of PTS in the veteran community, to increase public awareness of the condition, and to build a large-scale community effort dedicated to assisting affected veterans and their families.

The VA as well as other private and not-for-profit organizations have, on a national scale, produced and distributed public service announcements (PSA) focused on veteran transition, suicide awareness, and access to care. A number of veteran advocates propose the creation of an Illinois-centric PSA that would tactfully motivate veterans and their families to seek assistance for any issues related to PTS or other mental health challenges in Illinois. Advocates note that the PSA could feature a popular figure (like an NFL Chicago Bears Player) and a servicemember and/or veteran, who would make a joint statement as to the importance of confronting these challenges head-on in order to take control of the situation and obtain assistance.

At the same time, veteran advocates emphasize that there is a significant need to reinforce and highlight healthier, more positive life experiences of veterans who have served and successfully transitioned into their communities, perhaps even after coping successfully with PTS. Like the PSA, highlighting positive, relatable role models would instill confidence in the road to recovery and encourage veterans to seek support services.

Post-Traumatic Stress Policy Recommendations

Based on the information and challenges outlined in the issue overview section, the Task Force proposes the following policy recommendations:

- 1. Increase the Availability of Tricare Service Providers** - To increase access to PTS and treatment services at the community level for military retirees and members of the Guard and Reserve, the Task Force recommends that an analysis be conducted that crosswalks the availability of Tricare service providers with the demand for PTS treatment in the veteran community. For geographic areas with a gap in available services, the Task Force recommends that a factsheet be composed and distributed to local mental health practitioners informing them as to the process and benefits to becoming certified Tricare service providers. The IJF Behavioral Health Working Group is the appropriate coordinating mechanism for this to occur, with the group already providing Tricare certification information to community providers.

2. Train Community Service Providers and Tighten Linkages to the Veteran Services Committee - To foster greater mutual awareness, facilitate capacity-building, and further educate health care providers as to the challenges associated with PTS, the Task Force recommends that a concerted effort be undertaken to provide community behavioral health providers military and veteran expertise and equip them to better treat and direct the veterans they serve. The Task Force also recommends that military, veteran, and health care organizations identify and engage new opportunities for open discussion, best practice sharing, and collaboration with the goal of creating an integrated veteran support network that allows for a streamlined continuum of care. The IJF Working Group on Behavioral Health has been identified as a suitable vehicle to facilitate community integration, and indeed is already providing “Military and Veteran 101” training to community behavioral health providers.

3. Enhance Suicide Prevention Resources/Screening - To enhance prevention strategies and minimize the occurrence of suicide, the Task Force recommends that veteran organizations and service providers dedicate additional resources to foster awareness and understanding of suicide prevention needs within the military and veteran communities. This effort should highlight 24-hour hotlines, VA medical center emergency assistance, and community mental health counselors. It should also include coordinated suicide prevention services among community service providers, VA medical centers, and other first responders/behavioral health screeners. The IJF Behavioral Health Working Group has a Suicide Prevention Subcommittee that is ideally suited to take on a number of these tasks.

4. Increase Support Services for Military Sexual Trauma - To ensure that women veterans who have experienced Military Sexual Trauma (MST) have ready access to support and treatment services, the Task Force recommends that the VA increase its inventory of trained female counselors - as well as that community mental health providers be trained and equipped to treat the MST victims who will likely not access VA care for treatment. The IJF Behavioral Health Working Group has conducted several training sessions on this topic and is an appropriate body to continue this work.

5. Implement Frequent Screenings of PTS - To ensure that returning servicemembers who exhibit symptoms of PTS receive care promptly, the Task Force recommends that servicemembers receive additional screenings at regular intervals after their discharge, such as at the 30/60/90/180-day marks.

6. Build a Community Effort Among Health and Treatment Service Providers - To strengthen collaboration and foster mutual awareness among service providers (while simultaneously making it easier for veterans to connect with the full array of support services available), the Task Force recommends that health and treatment service providers establish mechanisms through which they can coordinate service delivery, make referrals, and ensure continuum of care. No single care solution is perfect for every veteran. Often a combination of therapies - from counseling to medication to recreational therapy - is needed. This can be accomplished by leveraging existing resources to establish a centralized referral and information-sharing mechanism (e.g. IJF).



APPENDIX A:

Minutes for the Meeting of the DISCHARGED SERVICEMEMBER TASK FORCE

Monday, December 17, 2012, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
Chicago VA Regional Office
2122 W. Taylor St.
Chicago, IL 60612

Subject of Discussion: Employment

Members Present

Rodrigo Garcia (Chairman) - Assistant Director, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs
Mark Bowman - Sergeant Major, Illinois National Guard
Jim Frazier - Survivor Outreach Service Officer, U.S. Army
Kevin Hull - Executive Director, Westside Institute for Science & Education
Duane Honeycutt - Chicago Veterans Business Administration Regional Office Director, USDVA
Eric Murray - Service Member & Family Support Services Branch Chief, IDMA
MaryAnn Romeo - VISN 12 Care Coordinator, USDVA
Alison Ruble - President and CEO, USO of Illinois
Grant Swinger - Military & Veterans Rights Bureau Chief, Illinois Attorney General

Members Not Present

Pam Althoff - Illinois State Senator
Linda Chapa LaVia - Illinois State Representative
Dan Kotowski - Illinois State Senator
Jim Watson - Illinois State Representative
Kenneth Clarke - President and CEO, Pritzker Military Library

Guests

Erica Borggren - Director, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs
Jaime Martinez - General Counsel, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs
Max Dulberger - Senior Aide to the Assistant Director, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs
Lane Knox - State Veterans Program Manager at Illinois Department of Employment Security.
Grace Jenkins - President and CEO, National Able Network
Patricia Mayfield - Director of the Illinois' Veterans Employment & Training Service, USDOL
Dottress Reeves - Asst. Director of the Illinois' Veterans Employment & Training Service, USDOL
Amy Quimby - Co-Chair of the Employment & Job Training Working Group, IL Joining Forces
Julio Rodriguez - Manager at the Illinois Department of Commercial & Economic Opportunity

APPENDIX B:

Minutes for the Meeting of the DISCHARGED SERVICEMEMBER TASK FORCE

Wednesday, March 27, 2013, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
Kizer Conference Center Journey Room, Jesse Brown VA Medical Center
820 S. Damen Ave.
Chicago, IL 60612

Subject of Discussion: Education

Members Present

Rodrigo Garcia (Chairman) - Assistant Director of the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs
Mark Bowman - Sergeant Major in the Illinois National Guard
Jim Frazier - Survivor Outreach Service Officer in the U.S. Army
Kevin Hull - Executive Director of the Westside Institute for Science & Education
Duane Honeycutt - Chicago Veterans Business Administration Regional Office Director, USDVA
Kenneth Clarke - President and CEO, Pritzker Military Library
Alison Ruble - President and CEO, USO of Illinois (via phone)
MaryAnn Romeo - VISN 12 Care Coordinator, USDVA (via phone)
Grant Swinger - Military & Veterans Rights Bureau Chief, Illinois Attorney General (via phone)
Eric Murray - Service Member & Family Support Services Branch Chief, IDMA (via phone)

Members Not Present

Pam Althoff - Illinois State Senator
Dan Kotowski - Illinois State Senator
Linda Chapa LaVia - Illinois State Representative
Wayne Rosenthal - Illinois State Representative

Guests

Erica Borggren - Director, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs
Joan Ryan - Administrator of the State Approving Agency, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs
Jaime Martinez - General Counsel, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs
Max Dulberger - Senior Aide to Assistant Director Garcia, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs
Dan Cullen - Deputy Director of Academic Affairs, Illinois Board of Higher Education
Brook Stewart - Assistant Director, Fiscal Affairs, Illinois Board of Higher Education
Jennifer Timmons - Senior Director for Student Development, Illinois Community College Board
Becky Klein - Director of Research, Council for Adult and Experimental Learning
Gerald Kapinos - Director of Operations, Student Veterans of America
Matthew Kim - Veterans Benefits Administration, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

APPENDIX C:

Minutes for the Meeting of the DISCHARGED SERVICEMEMBER TASK FORCE

Thursday, May 16, 2013, 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Pritzker Military Library

104 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 4th Floor

Chicago, IL 60603

Subject of Discussion: Homelessness and Housing

Members Present

Rodrigo Garcia (Chairman) - Assistant Director, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs

Jim Frazier - Survivor Outreach Service Officer, U.S. Army

Kevin Hull - Executive Director, Westside Institute for Science & Education

Duane Honeycutt - Chicago Veterans Business Administration Regional Office Director, USDVA

Kenneth Clarke - President and CEO, Pritzker Military Library

Grant Swinger - Military & Veterans Rights Bureau Chief, Illinois Attorney General

Eric Murray - Service Member & Family Support Services Branch Chief, IDMA

Alison Ruble - President and CEO, USO of Illinois (via phone)

MaryAnn Romeo - VISN 12 Care Coordinator, USDVA (via phone)

Members Not Present

Pam Althoff - Illinois State Senator

Dan Kotowski - Illinois State Senator

Linda Chapa LaVia - Illinois State Representative

Wayne Rosenthal - Illinois State Representative

Mark Bowman - Sergeant Major, Illinois National Guard

Guests

Erica Borggren - Director, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs

Deanna Mackey - Program Director, Prince Home, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs

Jaime Martinez - General Counsel, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs

Max Dulberger - Senior Aide to the Assistant Director, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs

Candice Bodie - Director of Homeless Veterans Program, Jesse Brown VA Medical Center

Katie Tuten - Project Director, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago

Gloria Wright - Program Director Cooke's Manor, Catholic Charities of Archdiocese of Chicago

Brian Rowland - CEO, A Safe Haven Foundation

Sterling Gildersleeve - Director of Operations and Programs, A Safe Haven Foundation

Nancy Hughes - President and CEO, Illinois Chapter of Volunteers of America

Richard Fox - Chief Legal Counsel and Former State Judge Advocate, Illinois National Guard

Araceli Orona - Program Coordinator, Community Research and Referral Center & Homeless Outreach, Jesse Brown VA Medical Center

APPENDIX D:

Minutes for the Meeting of the DISCHARGED SERVICEMEMBER TASK FORCE

Wednesday, October 3, 2012 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
James R. Thompson Center
100 W. Randolph St., Suite 5-570, Conference Room
Chicago, IL 60601

Subject of Discussion: Post-Traumatic Stress

Members Present

Rodrigo Garcia (Chairman) - Assistant Director, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs
Jim Frazier - Survivor Outreach Service Officer, U.S. Army
Kevin Hull - Executive Director, Westside Institute for Science & Education
Duane Honeycutt - Chicago Veterans Business Administration Regional Office Director, USDVA
Kenneth Clarke - President and CEO, Pritzker Military Library
Alison Ruble - President and CEO, USO of Illinois (via phone)
MaryAnn Romeo - VISN 12 Care Coordinator, USDVA (via phone)
Grant Swinger - Military & Veterans Rights Bureau Chief, Illinois Attorney General
Eric Murray - Service Member & Family Support Services Branch Chief, IDMA
Mark W. Bowman - Sergeant Major, Illinois National Guard
Pamela Althoff - Illinois State Senator

Members Not Present

Dan Kotowski - Illinois State Senator
Jim Watson - Illinois State Representative

Guests

Erica Borggren - Director, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs
Jaime Martinez - General Counsel, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs
Alberto Lopez - Staffer to the Assistant Director, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs
Curtis Smith - Guest of Senator Pamela Althoff
Akeela White - Assistant Attorney General, Military & Veterans Rights/Consumer Fraud, Office of the Illinois Attorney General



Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs
James R. Thompson Center
100 West Randolph, Suite 5-570
Chicago, IL 60601-3219

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