

Minutes for Idaho Veterans Affairs Commission

November 11, 2022

Hybrid In-Person & Virtually

Call to Order – 8:40 AM PT

Idaho Veterans Affairs Commission was held on Friday, November 11, 2022, in the Idaho State Veterans Home in Post Falls (located at 590 S Pleasant View Rd Post Falls, ID 83854) and virtually via Microsoft Teams.

Attendees

Commission Members in attendance: Chairman **Josh Callihan**, **Rockey Davis**, **Jinny Cash**, **Art Gimpel**, **Eugene Brown**

IDVS Staff Members in attendance included: IDVS Chief Administrator **Mark Tschampl**, IDVS Deputy Chief Administrator **Tracy Schaner**, IDVS Business Support Services Bureau Chief **Paul Spannkebel**, ISVH-Boise Administrator **Rick Holloway**, ISVH-Boise Deputy Home Administrator **Amber Goodchild**, ISVH-Lewiston Administrator **Mark High**, ISVH-Pocatello Administrator **Josiah Dahlstrom** (via Microsoft Teams), ISVH-Post Falls Administrator **Colleen Moon**, OVA Bureau Chief **Bill Heyob**, Community Resource Coordinator **Mitzi Cheldelin** and Management Assistant **Kevin Wallior**.

Number of Citizens in attendance: 2, Shirley Davis and Dick Heyob

Announcements

The meeting was preceded by a 8:30 AM Flag Ceremony outside in conjunction with the Dedication of the Idaho State Veterans Home Post Falls, which was conducted later in the day at 2:00 PM PT.

Approval of Minutes

Chairman Callihan asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting on August 2, 2022. **Commissioner Gimpel** identified some minor clerical errors that needed to be corrected to the minutes. **Commissioner Davis** motioned that the minutes be approved upon correction. **Commissioner Cash** seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

Community Outreach – presented by **Mitzi Cheldelin**

Spoke about her outreach efforts around the state working with Veterans Service Organizations and community members to serve Idaho Veterans. As an example of the impact her work has on the Veteran community, she highlighted a particular case in which she was able connect several private citizens and businesses with the Veteran which led to the Veteran having a temporary place to stay while his water heater was repaired.

Mitzi continues working with the Idaho Veterans Network and Find Help Idaho to compile a comprehensive list of all the organizations and services available to Veterans and their families in Idaho and create a free to use online Veterans Resource Directory. This directory is not yet live but will be searchable and filterable by content and geographic location.

Chairman Callihan commented that in his work with the Veterans community that Mitzi's outreach work has been noticed and has positively impacted the Idaho Veteran community.

Division Bureau Reports

Boise Veterans Home Report presented by **Rick Holloway**

Revenue is down. This is directly attributable to a reduced census. Staffing is limiting our census. Prior to COVID, Boise census was 110-112 and had 4 CNA vacancies. Currently, census is 70 and there are 30 CNA vacancies. IDVS Central Support Office (CSO) has been proactive and creative in trying to reduce the number of vacancies, but the biggest factor is a limited labor pool.

The domiciliary operates at a \$700,000 loss. In the process of phasing out the domiciliary program, not accepting new domiciliary applications. This program will not be continued when the new replacement State Veterans Home is built in Boise.

ISVH-Boise suffered a COVID outbreak in July-August. Fortunately moved out of outbreak status after a month. Opening to volunteering and events again.

Rick highlighted the positive relationship between the Boise VAMC and our State Veterans Homes. This is a rarity for many Veterans Homes across the country.

Questions and comments from the Commissioners:

Chairman **Callihan** – What will happen to the Veterans in the Dom/Res program when that program goes away?

Administrator Holloway – For those Veterans not ready to transition into skilled nursing, we will work with them to find other facilities in the area that can accommodate their needs.

Pocatello Veterans Home Report presented by **Josiah Dahlstrom**

Josiah appreciates the coordination with the Boise VAMC and mentioned that the relationship is smoother than with the Salt Lake City VAMC.

ISVH-Pocatello is currently in a COVID outbreak status. 16 residents are positive (which is falling), 6 staff members are positive (which is rising). The COVID outbreak is much different than last year's outbreak, and the lessons learned then have helped the facility navigate this year's better.

The census is currently 49, when the outbreak status has been resolved, we will work to increase the census. The relationship we have with Idaho State University has been key to navigating our census and staffing issues. Student clinical hours have helped w/staffing issues immensely allowing us to increase census.

In the past few months, Pocatello completed projects updating doors, security hardware, and wall rails. Unfortunately, no bids were received for a project replacing parking lot drains and this will have to go back out in the spring.

Community activities and normal facility activities have slowly returned to normal. When in outbreak status group activities are curtailed, but one-on-one activities are increased to make up for the lack of group activities.

The last annual survey from the state was conducted over 3 years ago. Overdue but unsure when it will be conducted.

Questions and comments from the Commissioners:

Commissioner Gimpel announced that the annual food convoy will occur on November 18th.

Chairman Callihan asked if he could assist with improving Pocatello's relationship with the Salt Lake City VAMC (Chairman Callihan is the Public Affairs Officer for the Boise VAMC). Josiah clarified his earlier comment. Didn't mean to imply the relationship with the SLC VAMC is negative. He only meant to emphasize his appreciation for the more personable relationship Pocatello has with the Boise VAMC.

Commissioner Brown asked for clarification regarding issues with the parking lot drain project. Mentioned that he is

the former DPW Director and offered to reach out to his contacts in the DPW about the project when he makes a trip to Boise on November 18th.

Lewiston Veterans Home Report presented by **Mark High**

ISVH-Lewiston has a census goal of 58. The facility is licensed for 66, but they would like to hold 8 beds in reserve for outbreak isolation and quarantine of new admits.

Typically, ISVH-Lewiston has a higher percentage of private pay residents than our other State Veterans Homes, but that has been slowly shifting in the past year as Lewiston has seen an increase in residents with service-connected disabilities.

ISVH-Lewiston had a COVID outbreak in September. 9 veterans tested positive, but it was contained and cleared in 3 weeks. Mark lauded his staff and highlighted following policy & procedures was a big reason the outbreak was contained so quickly.

Lewiston now has 17 regular volunteers a major sign that the facility is getting closer to pre-COVID norms with community support.

Lewiston completed their business office remodel. This project took longer than expected due to failed punch items from a subcontractor. Those items were finally resolved, and staff will be moving back into their spaces on Monday.

Initial work on the ISVH-Lewiston remodel has begun.

Our mission has led to staff who had previously left to work in other facilities to return to the fold. We continue to market our open positions to the community and surrounding areas.

Questions and comments from the Commissioners:

Commissioner Gimpel – Asked about cybersecurity and ransomware, and asked if our facilities have been targeted? Mark High said that our facility has not been impacted but indicated that a private facility in the area was targeted and had to pay a ransom to regain access to their systems.

Chairman Callihan – Any success in luring staff from contracted staffing agencies or other area facilities? Mark said not yet but mentioned that contract staffers are frequently impressed by the high number of staff to patient ratios compared to non-veteran home facilities. Hoping to use this to recruit some of them to make the switch.

Post Falls Veterans Home Report presented by **Colleen Moon**

Post Falls is actively hiring staff. Most of the leadership team has been hired and already begun working. Begun hiring RNs, LPNs, and CNAs. Dietary and Social Services has been slow, but 2 interviews are scheduled for next week. 7 new staff began this week. The staffing coordinator has been connecting with area schools, technical colleges, and colleges & universities. The quality of the facility has been positively impacting recruitment, everyone who has visited the facility is amazed by it.

Questions and comments from the Commissioners:

Commissioners and staff in attendance were very complimentary of the facility. Everyone agrees about how beautiful it is.

Chairman Callihan – asked how do our State Veterans Homes compare nationally? Our Administrators all emphasized how positively we compare to counterparts in other states both in our 5-star ratings, but also reputationally amongst our peers.

Office of Veterans Advocacy Report presented by **Bill Heyob**

- OVA statistics comparing 1st Qtr FY-2023 totals to FY-2022:

	<u>2023 YTD</u>	<u>2022 YTD</u>	<u>Increase/Decrease</u>
Interviews YTD	2,034	1,748	+ 286
Phone Interviews	13,078	11,277	+ 1,801
POAs Filed YTD	1,418	1,430	- 12
Claims Filed YTD	2,850	2,256	+ 594
Correspondence	2,371	1,473	+ 898
Appeals YTD	83	108	- 25
Home Visits	38	43	- 5
Veterans Seen by			
OVA in Vet Courts	135	149	- 14
State Emergency			
Grants Approved	0	1	- 1

- Comparing monthly totals of October 2022 to October 2021

Office Interviews: **776 (+252)**, Phone Interviews: **4,281 (+1,090)**, Claims Filed: **968 (+261)**

Noteworthy Issues - VA

Masks are no longer required within the VARO, and we no longer must report vaccination statuses of our Staff in the VARO.

With the "Honoring Our PACT Act" signed into Law on Aug 10, 2022, the VA has begun accepting claims; though the VA will not begin rating these claims until January 1, 2023, Veterans with active cancer will be rated first.

PACT Act has added presumptive conditions (see attachment). There will be no Nehmer Review for the expanded locations of herbicide presumptions, except for Presumptive DIC claims.

There is an 8.7% COLA going into effect for all Social Security and VA Benefits effective January 1st, 2023.

VHA has halted future rollouts of Cerner Medical Records.

On Oct. 24, 2022, approximately 15,000 community pharmacies including Walmart and Sam's Club are expected to leave the TRICARE retail pharmacy network. Any veterans impacted by this change need to transfer their prescriptions to an in-network pharmacy otherwise they will have to pay the full cost of the medication up front and then submit a claim for partial reimbursement. Affected beneficiaries should have received a communication from Express Scripts notifying them of this change. We have been contacted that Northern Idaho is being hit especially hard by this change and Idaho's Congressional Offices are aware of it.

VA Insurance Program is sunsetting the Service-Disability Life Insurance Program on 31 December 2022 and replacing it with a new program called VA Life. Those insured under S-DVI can keep their current coverage or switch to VALife. Veterans who are insured under S-DVI and elect to transfer their coverage to VALife can be insured under both programs during the initial two-year period after enrollment in VALife, if they apply between January 1, 2023, and December 31, 2025. Veterans who convert from S-DVI to VALife after December 31, 2025, cannot keep S-DVI during the VALife waiting period. VALife is available to all Veterans who have a service-connected disability rating (0-100%) and are age 80 and under are eligible; though some Veterans who are 81 or older may qualify. VALife eliminates

deadlines to apply (prior program had a strict two-year window), offers coverage up to \$40,000 in \$10,000 increments and offers a Cash Value component after 2 years. There is a two-year waiting period for coverage to begin but once approved, rates never increase.

Significant Events within the OVA

Personnel Changes- Ted McAuslan in our Pocatello Office resigned on September 16th and we hired Robertta Matulis to replace him. Robertta is an Air Force Veteran and was working for the Salt Lake VAMC in the Pocatello CBOC in Enrollment and Eligibility. Robertta also previously worked at the Idaho Department of Labor.

We conducted the 2022 County and Post Service Officer Training on August 3-5 and feedback showed that participants were very pleased with the training. We had approximately 79 attendees.

The most recent VFW training session was held in Annapolis, MD on September 18-23 in Annapolis, MD which combined the Advanced and Intermediate classes together. The in-person attendees were Abel Silva, Iris Higgins, and Bill Heyob, with Nick Percy and Darrel Homer attending remotely.

Our Staff is receiving many phone calls pertaining to Medicare Open Enrolment Season (pertaining to VAMC Care and Tricare) and Camp Lejeune Justice Act Claims.

Questions and comments from the Commissioners:

Chairman Callihan – Regarding the VA postponing the rollout of Cerner, rumors continue to percolate regarding future rollout dates. With the midterm election upcoming, there is no telling how that will impact rollout plans or the program period.

Veterans Cemetery Report presented by **Mark Tschampf**

The new Cemetery Director's start was delayed due to a family emergency. He will be on site in the next week or two.

IDVS was awarded a grant from the NCA grants program to expand our Cemetery in Boise.

The Burial Equity for Guard & Reserve Act, a temporary proposed rule will be in place to allow immediate implementation and we will seek legislative approval of the proposed rule during the 2024 legislative session.

Questions and comments from the Commissioners:

No Questions or comments.

Business Support Services Report presented by **Paul Spannkebel**

Education

Shannon Lambert and Abby Edgar, our Veterans Education Program Specialists, continue to do great work approving programs for education benefits including Institutes of Higher Learning (IHL), Non-College Degree Programs (NCD), On the Job Training Programs (OJT), and apprenticeships. They met the contracted VA obligations for the program. In FY2023 the VA is switching from compliance base surveys to risk-based surveys and complaint-based surveys.

In the process of hiring a new Technical Records Specialist to assist them with the administrative burden.

HR Report

Staffing continues to be an issue. Turnover is stable but there are a high number of vacancies.

IDVS received DHR approval to hire an HR Officer.

ITS continues to be a pain point for the agency. Trouble ticketing, computer hardware & software acquisition and support are areas of concern. We are making progress but still not up to standard.

Financial

68.9% skilled nursing occupancy and 36.1% dom occupancy.

We submitted our FY2024 budget request.

Post Falls private pay is \$370 per day and on January 1, 2023, Boise, Lewiston, and Pocatello will increase from \$219 per day to \$263 per day. On average the cost increased 30% or more. Historically semi-private room pay has been below market rate. Our homes are operating at a loss and the low census has exacerbated that. The increase in charge is necessary to continue to provide the quality our residents expect and deserve.

Questions from the Commissioners:

Chairman Callihan – How are resident applications weighted? Service-connected versus Private Pay versus Medicaid? Rick Holloway responding for all the Homes, generally our admissions coordinators don't look at the pay source first, other than to determine they have a pay source. Acuity of patient care and staffing are the primary concerns upon receipt of resident applications. Our admissions coordinator and business staff look at costs while our clinical staff consider the patient. The clinical staff will not see any of the financial information for the potential resident to ensure an impartial evaluation.

Central Support Office Updates

Post Falls Home presented by **Colleen Moon**

The Post Falls Home is targeting November 28th to begin admitting residents. Initial target is 3 admits a week. 2 residents are required for state licensing and 20 residents are required for VA licensing.

There are many touch ups and final punch items remaining. Staffing should time perfectly with those punch items being completed.

Chief Administrator Remarks & Construction Grants presented by **Mark Tschamp**

\$75 million is earmarked for IDVS to utilize for our match requirement for VA construction grants to rebuild the Boise Veterans Home and renovate the Pocatello and Lewiston Homes to single bed/single bathrooms.

The Boise Home replacement project is well into the schematic design phase. It will be a 5-story facility.

The Boise Home is at the top of the list for grants. Build America Buy America is creating some barriers that will need to be overcome. Increases the price tag significantly by ~\$20 million. We're seeking an exemption and creative changes to the plans to mitigate this unexpected barrier.

Lewiston is next on the list, but much further down (began planning in September). Pocatello is further down the list but close to Lewiston. Anticipate 5-6 years before Lewiston and Pocatello are near the top of the list.

Staffing is a significant issue for IDVS and other state agencies in general. Along with the directors of other state agencies, extremely active talking with the Governor's office and DFM about becoming more competitive in the employment market for staff. Increased wages only go so far. Need other ways to compete with the private sector who allow flexible schedules, childcare, etc. DHR is pursuing a statute change to allow for more flexible schedules. Other ideas, such as a childcare savings account match or housing subsidies, are harder to gain support.

We need staffing to increase our census which drives our revenue. Even more importantly, we have a waiting list for Veterans. These Veterans need our help and the only way we can meet their needs is by increasing staffing which means we need to increase our competitiveness with the private sector.

New Business

Chairman Callihan – asked for a Dry Creek Cemetery Update

Chief Administrator Tschampl - They are open to selling us land for market rate. Will require a site survey for evaluation. Will ask the state to negotiate the sale. This is necessary to meet the expanding needs of the Veterans Cemetery in Boise.

IDVS will be seeking another full-time staff member for the OVA to meet increased need.

Chairman Callihan thanked IDVS and their teams for all they do. "It's truly remarkable all of the work you do on behalf of Idaho Veterans. I am extremely proud of how our Idaho Team serves our Veterans Community. Thank you sincerely."

The next IVAC meeting will be in January coordinated with the Joint VFW/American Legion Legislative Reception. The dedication ceremony for the Post Falls Veterans Home will be later today at 2 PM PT.

Chairman Callihan is open to a motion to adjourn. **Commissioner Gimpel** motioned to adjourn at 10:44 AM PT. **Commissioner Brown** seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

Meeting was adjourned at 10:45 AM PT

Kevin R. Wallior
Management Assistant
Idaho Division of Veteran Services

Gulf War era and post-9/11 Veteran eligibility

Expand all +

What burn pit and other toxic exposure conditions are now presumptive?

We've added more than 20 burn pit and other toxic exposure presumptive conditions based on the PACT Act. This change expands benefits for Gulf War era and post-9/11 Veterans.

These cancers are now presumptive:

- Brain cancer
- Gastrointestinal cancer of any type
- Glioblastoma
- Head cancer of any type
- Kidney cancer
- Lymphatic cancer of any type
- Lymphoma of any type
- Melanoma
- Neck cancer
- Pancreatic cancer
- Reproductive cancer of any type
- Respiratory (breathing-related) cancer of any type

These illnesses are now presumptive:

- Asthma that was diagnosed after service
- Chronic bronchitis
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Chronic rhinitis
- Chronic sinusitis
- Constrictive bronchiolitis or obliterative bronchiolitis
- Emphysema
- Granulomatous disease
- Interstitial lung disease (ILD)
- Pleuritis
- Pulmonary fibrosis
- Sarcoidosis

If you served in any of these locations and time periods, we've determined that you had exposure to burn pits or other toxins. We call this having a presumption of exposure.

On or after September 11, 2001, in any of these locations:

- Afghanistan
- Djibouti
- Egypt
- Jordan
- Lebanon
- Syria
- Uzbekistan
- Yemen
- The airspace above any of these locations

On or after August 2, 1990, in any of these locations:

- Bahrain
- Iraq
- Kuwait
- Oman
- Qatar
- Saudi Arabia
- Somalia
- The United Arab Emirates (UAE)
- The airspace above any of these locations

We're extending and expanding VA health care eligibility based on the PACT Act. **We encourage you to apply, no matter your separation date.** Your eligibility depends on your service history and other factors.

If you meet the requirements listed here, you can get free VA health care for any condition related to your service for up to 10 years from the date of your most recent discharge or separation. You can also enroll at any time during this period and get any care you need, but you may owe a copay for some care.

At least one of these must be true of your active-duty service:

- You served in a theater of combat operations during a period of war after the Persian Gulf War, **or**
- You served in combat against a hostile force during a period of hostilities after November 11, 1998

And this must be true for you:

- You were discharged or released on or after October 1, 2013

We encourage you to enroll now so we can provide any care you may need now or in the future. Enrollment is free.

If you meet the requirements listed here, you can receive care and enroll during a special enrollment period between **October 1, 2022**, and **October 1, 2023**.

At least one of these must be true of your active-duty service:

- You served in a theater of combat operations during a period of war after the Persian Gulf War, **or**
- You served in combat against a hostile force during a period of hostilities after November 11, 1998

And both of these must be true for you:

- You were discharged or released between September 11, 2001, and October 1, 2013, **and**
- You haven't enrolled in VA health care before

We encourage you to apply during this 1-year period so we can provide you with any care you may need now or in the future. Enrollment is free. And your care may be free as well.

Vietnam era Veteran eligibility

What new Agent Orange presumptive conditions will VA add?

Based on the PACT Act, we've added 2 new Agent Orange presumptive conditions:

- High blood pressure (also called hypertension)
- Monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance (MGUS)

If you think you're eligible for VA health care and benefits, we encourage you to apply now.

We've added these 5 new locations to the list of presumptive locations:

- Any U.S. or Royal Thai military base in Thailand from January 9, 1962, through June 30, 1976
- Laos from December 1, 1965, through September 30, 1969
- Cambodia at Mimot or Krek, Kampong Cham Province from April 16, 1969, through April 30, 1969
- Guam or American Samoa or in the territorial waters off of Guam or American Samoa from January 9, 1962, through July 30, 1980
- Johnston Atoll or on a ship that called at Johnston Atoll from January 1, 1972, through September 30, 1977

If you served on active duty in any of these locations, we'll automatically assume (or "presume") that you had exposure to Agent Orange.

What new radiation presumptive locations will VA add?

We've added these 3 new response efforts to the list of presumptive locations:

- Cleanup of **Enewetak Atoll**, from January 1, 1977, through December 31, 1980
- Cleanup of the Air Force B-52 bomber carrying nuclear weapons off the coast of **Palomares, Spain**, from January 17, 1966, through March 31, 1967
- Response to the fire onboard an Air Force B-52 bomber carrying nuclear weapons near **Thule Air Force Base in Greenland** from January 21, 1968, to September 25, 1968

If you took part in any of these efforts, we'll automatically assume (or "presume") that you had exposure to radiation.