

Minutes for Idaho Veterans Affairs Commission

October 26, 2023

Hybrid In-Person & Virtually

Call to Order – 8:30 AM MT

Idaho Veterans Affairs Commission was held on Wednesday, October 26, 2023, at the Idaho State Veterans Home - Pocatello (located at 1957 Alvin Ricken Dr. Pocatello, ID 83201) and virtually via Microsoft Teams.

Attendees

Commission Members in attendance: **Chairman Josh Callihan, Jinny Cash, Rockey Davis** (virtual), **Eugene Brown**

IDVS Staff Members in attendance included: IDVS Chief Administrator **Mark Tschampl**, IDVS Deputy Chief Administrator **Tracy Schaner** (virtual), ISVH-Boise Administrator **Rick Holloway**, ISVH-Post Falls Interim Home Administrator **Amber Goodchild** (virtual), ISVH-Pocatello Administrator **Josiah Dahlstrom**, Idaho State Veterans Cemeteries Bureau Chief **Jacob Faulkner** (virtual), HR Officer Angela Hamilton, Community Resource Admin Assistant **Marisa McCarter** (Virtual), and Management Assistant **Kevin Wallior**.

Absent: Commissioner Art Gimpel due to technical difficulties accessing Microsoft Teams.

Number of Citizens in attendance: 0

Announcements

Colleen Moon resigned as the Idaho State Veterans Home – Post Falls Administrator. Amber Goodchild was announced as the Interim Home Administrator.

Longtime Commissioner and former Chairman Mel Napier passed away. His funeral service will be held at 3PM on October 26, 2023. Deputy Administrator Tracy Schaner and Commissioner Art Gimpel will be representing IDVS and IVAC to show our respect for his long tenure serving Idaho Veterans.

Approval of Minutes

Chairman Callihan asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting on July 12, 2023. **Commissioner Brown** motioned for approval. **Commissioner Cash** seconded. The motion was approved with unanimous assent.

Community Outreach – presented by **Marisa McCarter**

Spoke about outreach efforts around the state working with Veterans Service Organizations and community members to serve Idaho Veterans. Between July 1 and September 30, connected with 484 Veterans, 108 Civilians, and 6,371 mixed groups across 74 events. Year to date visited 38/44 Idaho counties.

Highlighted Community Events this quarter:

- Idaho American Legion Summer Conference
- City of Caldwell 4th of July
- Boise VA Patient Appreciation BBQ
- Gowen Thunder
- POW/MIA Recognition Day
- Annual Veteran Service Officer Training by OVA

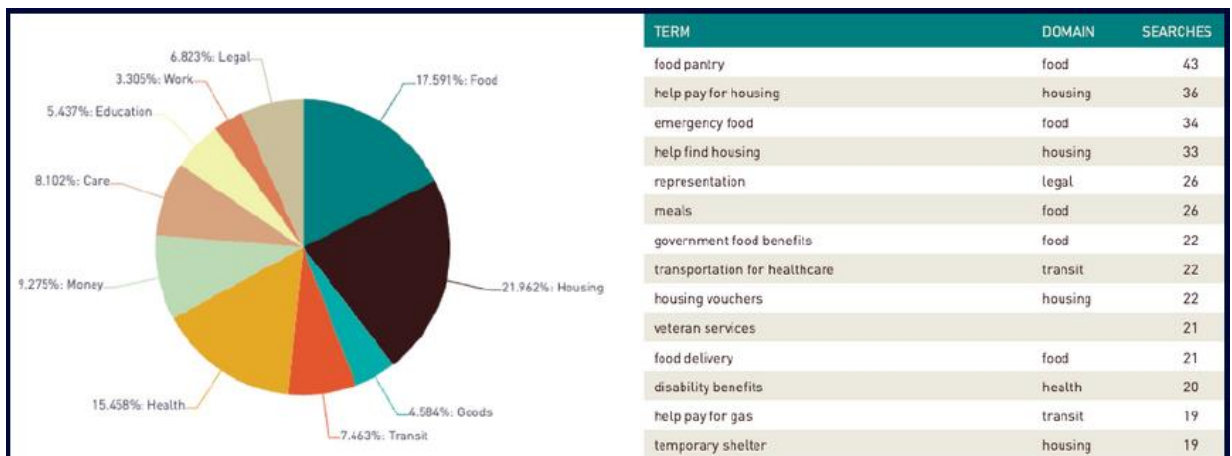
- Aaron Butler Purple Heart Run
- 9/11 Remembrance Run by Mission43
- Chrome at the Home
- Idaho National Guard Retiree Briefs
- USS Idaho’s visit to Northern Idaho

Contributions through Outreach:

- Raised \$36,954.95 in direct Veterans Support thanks to Community Partners.
- Male Veteran in Idaho struggling to overcome dependency had a friend from Georgia reach out to get him help. This sparked a joint effort across multiple states and agencies. The veteran was connected to Operation Grateful Hearts who reached out to Mitzi at IDVS. A community effort began to get rehabilitation covered for this veteran, travel costs, rent covered, and his dogs kenneled for the duration of his rehabilitation. Not only were all costs covered, but volunteers also showed up to meet him at the airport when he came home to continue his recovery.

Ongoing Projects

- Governor's Challenge – Moving through year one of the Governor's Challenge setting up the framework for Suicide Prevention Initiatives in the state of Idaho. We seek to bring together existing support to reach all veterans in need with an all-encompassing approach to mental health.
- Joining Forces: Treasure Valley and Magic Valley – A monthly meeting to bring together all veteran support in our local community to share resources ensuring no veteran in need is turned away from a Veteran Resource Organization. Working to take this program statewide.
- Idaho Veterans Guide – Report from July 1 – September 30, 2023
 - 79 Programs Added (4,170 Total)
 - 58 Programs Claimed (1,138 Total)
 - Programs by Area:
 - Local – 2,330 total
 - State – 935 total
 - National – 905 total
 - Top 5 Local Engaged Programs –IDVS, Office of Veterans Advocacy; IDNG Family Programs; Newby-Ginnings-Necessities; Kootenai County, Veterans Service Office; ID Veterans Network, Community Resources
 - Site Activity: 1,941 Searches, 1,028 Interactions
 - Site Search Trends:



Chairman Callihan: Your team is doing a great job. The work is impressive and everywhere I go I hear from Veterans who have been positively impacted by the outreach IDVS is doing.

Division Bureau Reports

Fiscal Report presented by **Mark Tschampl**

Census is good. Boise Home reduced from 122 to 80 skilled beds. This will allow the Boise Home to reach the 90% threshold for VA reimbursement while also preparing for the reduction of beds once demolition and construction begins on the Boise Replacement Home. With the Dom/Res program going away, there remains only one Dom/Res resident and a place has already been lined up for him in a new facility.

LUMA – launched w/out the ability to create some necessary reports. This has added to delays in some fiscal processes.

FY2025 Budget request was submitted.

- 1.6% General Funds
- Equipment purchases
- Building Construction/DPW requests; including a Boise Cemetery Office Expansion project; upgraded electrical for Blackfoot Cemetery
- Additional positions requested to increase groundskeeping staff.

Anticipate another deficit this year. In FY2026 IDVS will likely need to request additional General Funds due to the increased costs of everything. Been prepping the Governor and the Legislature in previous years for this eventuality.

HR Report presented by **Angela Hamilton**

Luma – Two statewide emails were sent due to Payroll errors. This should get resolved with minimal to no disruption to employee pay. Some staff, depending on bank, may see their checks post a day later than normal.

Shift in HR structure. HR Specialist from CSO is moving over to the Boise Home because the Boise Home HR Specialist was promoted and is relocating to a different State Division (Juvenile Corrections).

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

In September, the Boise Home was recertified by the VA as an 80-bed occupancy facility. This will remain the official bed count until the new State Veterans Home is completed. Only 1W and 2W will be available during construction.

	Census							
	Nursing Care			Medicare A		Residential/Domiciliary Care		
	Days of Care	Avg Daily Census	Occupancy Rate	Days of Care	Avg Daily Census	Days of Care	Avg Daily Census	Occupancy Rate
July	2,051	66	54%	61	2	321	10	29%
August	2,195	71	58%	29	1	258	8	23%
September	2,292	76	96%	3	0	141	5	13%
Total/Avg	6,538	71	58%	93	1.0	720	8	22%

Also in September, Rick and a staff member drove three Dom/Res Veterans to the Wyoming State Veterans Home in Buffalo, WY. The Veterans love their new home, and the drive was a fun road trip for everyone involved. Relocating

our Dom/Res Veterans to safe new homes was of paramount importance. There is only one Dom/Res Veteran remaining in the Boise Home and he will be relocated to his new Home in the Treasure Valley by the end of the month. At that point the Dom/Res program will officially cease at the Idaho State Veterans Home – Boise.

During the hot summer months there were some issues with the chillers. Chiller 1 main fuse repair was completed. New panel was installed on chiller 1. Chiller 2 compressor was rebuilt and serviced. Ice cream freezer fans were replaced, and new drain system was installed.

A community donation allowed staff to take residents to Top Golf. The annual food convoy is coming up. Traditionally, over \$40,000 worth of food donations are received.

The Boise Home continues to struggle with staffing, particularly LPNs and CNAs. Despite these staffing issues, customer satisfaction ratings remain high.

The Boise Home went a to smoke-free facility in August. Struggling with compliance.

The last state survey was 3 years ago. Unsure of when the next one will occur.

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

Census trends show an increase in occupancy. In 2022 the average was 40/66 expect 2024 to be approximately 50/66.

	Census				
	Nursing Care			Medicare A	
	Days of Care	Avg Daily Census	Occupancy Rate	Days of Care	Avg Daily Census
Jul	1,612	52	78%	60	1.9
Aug	1,581	51	77%	11	0.4
Sep	1,470	49	75%	0	0.0
Total/Avg	4,663	51	77%	71	0.0

DPW & Maintenance Projects:

- 20-604 Replace/Install Parking lot drains – Completed by September. The drainage system appears to be working correctly since we have had numerous large storms with no issues. We are still waiting for approval for an additional emergency evacuation entrance at north end of property, connecting the health department parking lot. Currently processing a service contract in Project Mates to get the work completed before the cold weather hits.
- 21-606 The exterior concrete work surrounding the entrance was completed by September. We are still awaiting doors for the main hallway.
- 22-600 Boiler and Chiller Replacement – combined and in process. Drawings are in to DOPL for plan review.

Pocatello has a consistent number of students cycling through. Been able to successfully convert some of them into permanent staff following their clinical rotations.

Surveys

Last Annual State Survey 08/05/2019; this is over 4 years past due.

State: 08/05/2019 **Life Safety:** 12/06/2022 **CMS:** 06/24/2020 **VA:** 06/21/2023

Showcased a slideshow video of the various activities and events Veterans participated in during the previous quarter.

BREAK 9:30 AM – 9:40 AM

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

The Lewiston Census is currently 75%. Lewiston, and Pocatello for that matter, will probably reduce occupancy during their construction projects, too. The Census likely would stay the same, but the percentage would increase due to the reduced occupancy certification.

		Census				
		Nursing Care		Medicare A		
		Days of Care	Avg Daily Census	Occupancy Rate	Days of Care	Avg Daily Census
Jul		1,558	50	76%	30	1.0
Aug		1,552	50	76%	17	0.5
Sep		1,458	49	74%	15	0.5
Total/Avg		4,568	50	75%	62	0.7

Customer satisfaction remains high at the Lewiston Home.

Activities

- Residents attended the Radials n' River's air show. This event showcases vintage aircraft such as a B25 Mitchell and P51 Mustangs. Hangar 180 coordinates this event and was kind enough to offer a sneak preview at the hangar when 2 of the F18's arrived.

Staffing – CMS is looking at a rule to require minimum staffing levels. This is not an ideal time to implement such a rule as there are staffing challenges industry wide. RNs and CNAs only credit for nursing hours. LPNs, activities staff don't currently count towards staffing levels under CMS guidelines.

It has been 4 years since the last state survey for Lewiston, too.

Showcased a slideshow video of the various activities and events Veterans participated in during the previous quarter.

Post Falls Veterans Home Report presented by **Amber Goodchild**

Census currently sits at 26 and will be 27 by the end of the day. The goal is an increase of two residents per week.

Activities Coordinator – a volunteer application and orientation program has been developed and implemented.

Customer Satisfaction rating program wasn't yet implemented in July or August but was in September. The first rating was a 5.

DPW & Maintenance Projects:

- Punchlist items continue.

The dietary and kitchen team continue excellent work and are establishing special meals.

The Post Falls team continues to establish and enhance partnerships with community organizations.

Some fun activities that have been implemented: non-alcoholic happy hours in the sports pub; a mobile library

program, for Halloween local school children trick or treated.

Post Falls is working with their IVAC to continue to fundraise to improve the quality of life of our residents.

	Census				
	Nursing Care			Medicare A	
	Days of Care	Avg Daily Census	Occupancy Rate	Days of Care	Avg Daily Census
Jul	553	18	27%	0	0.0
Aug	600	19	29%	0	0.0
Sep	599	19	29%	0	0.0
Total/Avg	1,752	19	29%	0	0.0

Chairman Callihan: Will Amber be the permanent hire for the Home Administrator position?

Tracy: We appreciate Amber for stabilizing leadership in the Post Falls Home and getting the facility back on track. We also appreciate the staff the other three Homes have loaned to Post Falls to share their knowledge and expertise and help establish a positive culture in the Post Falls Home. The job announcement for the Post Falls Home Administrator has been posted and 4-6 high quality candidates will be interviewed on November 15. Our leadership team did ask Amber if she was interested in the permanent position, but she politely declined, preferring to remain in Boise. [Note: Amber changed her mind and did in fact choose to interview for the position. She was offered the position and she accepted. She was announced as the permanent new Home Administrator on December 7, 2023.]

OVA Report presented by **Bill Heyob**

OVA statistics comparing YTD FY-2024 totals to FY-2023:

	2024 YTD	2023 YTD	Increase/Decrease
Interviews YTD	2,324	2,034	+ 290
Phone Interviews	17,240	13,078	+ 4,162
POAs Filed YTD	1,802	1,418	+ 384
Claims Filed YTD	3,628	2,850	+ 778
Correspondence	2,508	2,371	+ 137
Appeals YTD	147	83	+ 64
Home Visits	73	45	+ 28
 Veterans Seen by OVA in Vet Courts	 108	 135	 - 27
 State Emergency Grants Approved	 1	 0	 + 1

Comparing the September 2023 to September 2022 resulted in (131) additional office interviews, (1,426) additional phone calls, (184) additional claims filed and (79) additional Requests for representation (POAs) filed to the VA.

Noteworthy Issues Currently Happening with the VA

- Boise VA Regional Office is continuing to hire (20) new employees as part of the VBA Expansion due to

workload increase due to the PACT Act. The Boise VR&E office is hiring (3) new counselors.

- VBA continues Mandatory Overtime while trying to work on pending claims.
- Since the VA began accepting PACT Act Presumptive claims, the VA (Nationally) now has an active inventory of over 1.8 million claims which is expected to grow until December 31st. VA is currently processing 8,000 claims per day with a goal of reaching 10,000 claims per day. Of the claims pending, Idaho Pact Act Claims currently total approximately 2,700.
- VA has discovered that there is a problem with an estimated 56,000 online Dependency Claim Submissions from the VA.gov website and has begun notifying Veteran of potential problems.
- With the large number of pending Camp Lejeune Contaminated Water claims, the government has introduced a settlement program, offering compensation of up to \$450,000 to individuals, including Camp Lejeune veterans, who claim they were harmed by contaminated water at the North Carolina Marine base which will be based on the type of condition and the duration of exposure. For example, a veteran with over five years at the base who developed kidney cancer could receive \$450,000 and someone who spent less than a year there and later suffered from kidney cancer would receive \$150,000. If the person was at Lejeune between one year and five years, it would be \$300,000. Claimants have until August 9, 2024, to file a claim under the Camp Lejeune Contaminated Water Act.
- VA increase the Award Rate for Non-Service Connected Burial Benefit to \$948.00. The Plot Allowance Rate is \$948.00 if a Veteran is interred in a private cemetery. The VA is also paying transportations costs that are identified on the Itemized Funeral Bills. Service Connected Burial Awards will also pay the transportation costs on top of the \$2,000 award.

Significant Events within the OVA

- We successfully conducted the Annual County and Post Service Officer Training with approximately 80 in attendance.
- OVA participated in the VFW Annual Skills Level Training in Annapolis, MD that was held from September 10-14. We had (5) attend in person (Frank, Nick, Paul, Stacy and Robert) and (4) attend remotely.
- We have lost our long time Administrative Assistant II (Jennel Binsky) in the Boise VA Regional Office and will be conducting job interviews for a replacement next week.
- OVA will be announcing a new VSO position for the Pocatello Office to replace Darrel Homer in the near future.
- We are in the process of hiring a new VSO to be working in the Boise VARO as we are in the process of modifying our office layout to permit additional cubicles.
- The new [Quarterly OVA Bulletin](#) should be released within the next week or so.

Veterans Cemetery Report presented by Jake Faulkner

DPW or Major Maintenance:

- DPW 20-606 Boise Cemetery Expansion
 1. Memorial Wall-Stage 1 of concrete footings poured and stage 2 concrete forms in place.
 2. Inground Urn Expansion-Realigining plots to match irrigation main line through field.
 3. Space Force Seal- Matching stone and plaque have been ordered.
- DPW 24-601 Boise Bathroom Renovation (6 Total)
 1. Site assessment Completed.
 2. ADA compliance assessment completed. Grab bars to be moved in all bathrooms.

- DPW 21-605 Blackfoot Maintenance Bldg., Public Bathroom/Conference Room, Memorial Wall
 1. Shop is 70% external completion. Awaiting shop doors and break room addition.
 2. Public bathroom/conference room plans are awaiting IDOPL/DBS approval.
 3. Memorial Wall is 80% completed. Awaiting install of stainless-steel framework.

- DPW 24-600 Blackfoot Erosion Control
 1. MOA signed with local farmer to farm additional 20 acres of unutilized land IDVS land.
 2. Developing landscaping plan for importation of mature trees, additional road access, flood mitigation.
 3. Flood mitigation step 1, perimeter road graded to provide 1-2' berm and runoff channel.

- DPW 24-602 ADA Automatic Doors
 1. Requesting Bids

Veteran Interments

Jul	Cemetery Boise: 46	Cemetery Blackfoot: 10	
Aug	Cemetery Boise: 50	Cemetery Blackfoot: 10	
Sep	Cemetery Boise: 56	Cemetery Blackfoot: 10	
YTD	Cemetery Boise: 152	Cemetery Blackfoot: 30	Total Cemetery Bureau: 182

Dependent Interments

Jul	Cemetery Boise: 20	Cemetery Blackfoot: 1	
Aug	Cemetery Boise: 22	Cemetery Blackfoot: 0	
Sep	Cemetery Boise: 24	Cemetery Blackfoot: 3	
YTD	Cemetery Boise: 66	Cemetery Blackfoot: 4	Total Cemetery Bureau: 70

Volunteer Hours

Jul	185
Aug	240
Sep	226
YTD	651

Other Important Events/Information

Ada County United Veterans Council provided a staff appreciation BBQ. Implementation of the Burial Equity Act on hold until legislative approval during the 2024 legislative session due to proposed fee increases. VA Plot Allowance increased from \$893 to \$948 effective October 01, 2023.

Wreathes Across America will be December 16th.

Education Report presented by Mark Tschamp

Education Team do all the assessments for education facilities. Contract with the VA. Our current team is meeting the standard to a high degree. They have increased outreach significantly.

Submitted FY2023 End-of-Year Compilation Report to VA on 10/20/2023 (Of note Education deadlines for the VA follow the Federal Fiscal year rather than the state Fiscal year.)

Here is a high-level the summary submitted to VA:

- a) Completed 61 facility approval packages, a 55.3% increase in approval activities from FY22. Approved 2678 existing or new programs & disapproved a total of 138 programs.
- b) Withdrew 4 facilities.
- c) Completed all 8 Risk-Based Surveys. RBS efforts resulted in the withdrawal of a faculty & its program due to grievous non-compliance violations.
- d) Increased FY23 Technical Assistance, Liaison, and Outreach activities by 80.5% when comparing to the same type of activities in FY22.

FY24 VA Allocation is approved for \$205,128.00 in September.

Contributions to the Idaho Economy

FY23 - FINAL		
Gender of Beneficiary	Total Paid	Percentage of Usage
Female	\$ 11,796,730.58	26.81%
Male	\$ 28,112,802.80	63.88%
Not Reported	\$ 4,098,404.39	9.31%
Grand Total	\$ 44,007,937.77	100.00%

2,971 Idahoan Beneficiaries served in FY23

FY22 - FINAL		
Gender of Beneficiary	Total Paid	Percentage of Usage
+ Female	\$ 12,345,073.28	48.99%
+ Male	\$ 28,739,368.61	43.96%
+ Not Reported	\$ 367,419.78	7.04%
Grand Total	\$ 41,451,861.67	100.00%

3,127 Idahoan Beneficiaries served in FY22

Chairman Callihan: the economic impact of Veterans utilizing their federal benefits in Idaho is substantial. The ROI from what we spend to assist Veterans in obtaining their benefits versus how much money they receive in benefits is significant.

Central Support Office Updates

Deputy Chief Administrator Update presented by Tracy Schaner

Tracy traveled to the Post Falls Home on October 3-4 and met with ~95% of the current staff. There are several qualified Home Administrator candidates for the Post Falls Home. Tracy will travel back to Post Falls October 15-16 to

conduct interviews.

The Boise & Lewiston Home projects are nearing the 50% CD phases, and we will be having page turner meetings the first week of December to review the drawings for accuracy and to verify the projects are still within budget.

For the Boise Replacement project, IDVS is the acting lead agency for conducting the National Environmental Policy Act compliance process. As part of this process, we worked with our consultants and the VA in preparing a Draft EA which was finalized, and a Notice was posted in the local paper and on our website at the end of August as we were required to provide a 30-day public comment period. We did not receive any comments, so we finalized and issued the Finding of No Significant Impact report, which has been signed off by the VA.

The Pocatello project had its kickoff meeting to start the programming meeting. Will meet every other week as the project enters SDs.

NASVH

Tracy is the current President of NASVH, as part of her responsibilities she attended the NASDVA summer conference with Mark Tschampl in August to present on behalf of NASVH.

Tracy met with the Office of the IGA and the Deputy of the Surgeon General's Office to discuss underserved Veterans with behavioral health care needs.

Was in Washington, DC the week of September 18 to attend the VA Geriatric and Gerontology Advisory Committee meeting which is held 2x/year and was invited back to present in April in DC. Also met with the House and Senate VA Committee staffers for both the Majority & Minority and spoke about several matters impacting our SVH to include the new CMS proposed minimum staffing requirements. While in DC met with Senator Crapo's staff and then upon returning to Boise, Mark and Tracy had a meeting with Representative Risch's staff to discuss these same issues.

Will be in Washington, DC on Veterans Day. Will have breakfast at the White House & attend the Arlington National Cemetery Ceremony. Following this Ceremony will be attending and presenting at the Wreath Laying Ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Attempting to schedule a meeting with the VA Under Secretary during this trip.

Chairman Callihan: Idaho's contributions and impact on Veterans issues at the national level continues to impress.

Tracy Schaner: Idaho is unique amongst its counterparts. We have positive, collaborative relationships with our federal counterparts that other states have not been able to duplicate. We believe this is a significant factor in allowing our state to continue to achieve at levels not seen in other states. We are very fortunate that our agency, the Boise VARO, and our VAMC leadership teams all work and collaborate well together.

Mark Tschampl: In addition, our team have taken on leadership roles within our national organizations. In addition to Tracy being President of NASVH, Mark High is a Region 4 leader in NASVH, and Mark Tschampl is the Western Region leader for NASDVA.

Our Veteran Contact List has received a lot of interest from our counterparts in other states to replicate in their states. We are working with Transunion to improve data analysis to determine Veterans at high-risk for homelessness, financial hardship, and suicidal ideation. We want to be in a preventative stance not a reactive stance.

Our Joining Forces coalition is being replicated across the state and we are passing on the lessons we've learned in scaling those efforts to our counterparts in other states, as well.

Our Veterans Resource Guide – is easily replicable. For a \$5,000 initial cost which is a very low threshold, we were able to create a valuable resource for Veterans that connects them to the resources available in their communities and provides valuable data back to us to advocate to the Governor and Legislature for increased funding and programming.

Chief Administrator's Remarks presented by **Mark Tschamp**

Continue to focus on outreach.

Goal to expand and improve dental care and assistance for Veterans. Working with our Outreach team, Mitzi and Marisa, to compile a list of dental providers willing to provide dental care to Veterans for free or at a reduced cost.

Chairman Callihan: willing to assist from the VA to help connect our Outreach team with Dental providers who have previously reached out to the VAMC.

Want to expand mental health care access and increase general wellbeing of Veterans through peer to peer groups across the state. Wyoming has had success with a program called Veterans Talking to Veterans. These Veterans get certified to become mental health group leaders.

New Business

Discuss reaching out to Idaho Fish and Game about limiting the Disabled Veteran Special Big Game Tag program to Idaho Veterans only.

Commissioner Rockey Davis has decided not to renew his appointment. Please do outreach to any potential candidates that you think would be a good fit to join the Idaho Veterans Affairs Commission.

Proposed a four-year rotation whereas 3 of the quarterly IVAC meetings are held in Boise, but one will be held at a different State Veterans Home in October. Post Falls was October 2022, Pocatello was October 2023, Lewiston for October 2024 tentatively.

The next IVAC meeting is tentatively scheduled for January on the Thursday of the same week as the legislative reception.

Chairman Callihan is open to a motion to adjourn. **Commissioner Brown** motioned to adjourn at 11:10 AM MT. **Commissioner Cash** seconded. The motion was approved with unanimous assent.

Meeting was adjourned at 11:10 AM MT

Kevin R. Wallior
Management Assistant
Idaho Division of Veteran Services