



# ILLINOIS

## DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AFFAIRS and DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS



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### Illinois Joining Forces [illinoisjoiningforces.org](http://illinoisjoiningforces.org)

#### OVERVIEW

Illinois Joining Forces (IJF) is a joint Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) and Department of Military Affairs (DMA) effort to better serve veterans, service members, and their families throughout the state. IJF will bring together, under a common umbrella, public, non-profit, and volunteer organizations in order to foster increased awareness of available resources and collaboration among participating organizations.

#### BACKGROUND

Despite the encouraging support for veterans and military members, the sheer volume of the organizations involved can be overwhelming – both to those we seek to support and to those involved in the advocacy and support community. It is estimated that Illinois alone has as many as 500 veteran- and military-related organizations. Because of the stove-piped efforts of these organizations, resources available to our veterans, service members, and families are abundant but incoherent and, at times, duplicative. Too often, due to insufficient dialogue among and collaboration between the many entities involved in serving veterans and service members, the very heroes our efforts are meant to serve are left frustrated and unaware of the many resources available to them.

#### OBJECTIVES

The IJF will be characterized by:

- A focus on active collaboration, as well as streamlining of duplicative services through partnership commitments to better support veterans, service members, and their families.
- A network of organizations with improved capacity, awareness, and intra-network referrals.
- Increased effectiveness of the many resources provided by veteran- and military-related organizations in Illinois through transparency and navigability.
- Production of practical, impactful policy recommendations to be included in the annual report of the Illinois Discharged Service Member Task Force.

#### IJF Launch

DMA and DVA will formally operationalize IJF immediately following an IJF Launch Program which is being supported by the Impact Center, a non-profit organization specializing in stakeholder engagement and de-stovepiping. Taking place from now through November 2012, the program will involve stakeholder assessment and surveys, as well as development of the IJF online platform. This Launch Program will culminate in a major IJF Launch Summit.

## **Post-Launch Work of IJF**

Upon the conclusion of the Impact Center's IJF Launch Program in November 2012, IJF will carry forward the Program's momentum and substance, to include the online platform. IJF will stand up with robust participation and, through the website, a platform for continued collaboration and internal referrals. Following the Launch Summit, IJF will serve as a coordination focal point for organizations across Illinois and will lead to a more navigable system of support for service members, veterans, and their families

This will be accomplished in part through the creation of several issues-focused IJF working groups. These working groups will capitalize on the cross-sector expertise and perspectives of participating organizations. The IJF working groups will include, at a minimum: healthcare, behavioral health, homelessness, disability benefits, legal, deployment support, education, and employment & training.

In addition to the online referral network and collaboration tool, IJF will continue to conduct working group meetings at least quarterly to maintain awareness of ongoing work by participating organizations and to address targeted military and veterans' issues. The new, statewide IJF will achieve more coordinated services and outreach for service members, veterans, and their families.

Once working groups are established and functioning well, the IJF will play an educational role for the many social service organizations that serve the military and veterans but do not have military/veteran-specific programs. Using the military and veteran expertise of IJF members, IJF working groups will offer "Military 101" sessions tailored to their specific functional area. For example, the Behavioral Health Working Group might offer a "Combat Stress 101" class to interested civilian mental health care providers – or the deployment support working group might offer a "Military Families 101" course to interested civilian primary school educators. This education will grow the collective capacity of Illinois-based organizations to serve our military and veteran communities.

As a result of Illinois Joining Forces and the collaboration it enables, the entire "system of support" will be more navigable for service providers and for the service members, veterans, and families we all strive to serve.