ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON AGING
WEBEX MEETING
DRAFT MINUTES
TUESDAY, MARCH 10, 2026
10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON AGING (ICoA) MEMBERS PRESENT:

Sue Vega, Kim Hunt, Julie Bobitt, Britta Larson, Donya Flohr, Anthany Frazier, Christina Hardin-Weiss, Talat Khan, Susan Lawler, Steven Lord, Sylvia Mahle, Phyllis Mitzen, Edgar Ramirez, Kate Schwartz, Sherry Sparks, Meijan Linda Yu, Representative Rita Mayfield, and Cheryl Larson representing Senator Dave Syverson

ICoA MEMBERS ABSENT:

Paulette Hamlin, Crystal Odom-McKinney, Senator Laura Fine, Senator Mattie Hunter, Representative Jason Bunting, Representative Maura Hirschauer, Representative Tom Weber

VISITORS and GUESTS:

Angie Simmons, Senior Home Administrator, Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs

ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT ON AGING (IDoA) STAFF PRESENT:

Mary Killough, Director
Rhonda Armstead, General Counsel
Michelle Hoersch, Chief Planning Officer, Multi-Sector Plan on Aging
Sandy Pastore, Senior Policy Advisor
David Perry, Attorney
T'Kira Siler-Wilkerson, Deputy Division Manager of Home & Community Services
Brian Pastor, Division Manager of Advocacy & Prevention Services
Adrienne Grover, Deputy Division Manager of Advocacy & Prevention Services
Kelly Richards, State Long-Term Care Ombudsman
Glenda Love, Deputy State Home Care Ombudsman
Iris Huber, Public Information Officer
Emily Howerton, Budget & Finance Manager
Jennifer Hebel, Special Research Assistant for the Executive Office
Roberta Vojas, Legislative Administrative Assistant
Desire Bernard, Special Assistant on Community Engagement & Equity
Lisa Zuurbier, Division Manager of Community Relations & Outreach
Sandy Leith, Senior Health Insurance Program Director
Lisa Dupoy, Administrative Assistant, Division of Community Relations & Outreach

SUMMARY

OPENING:

The meeting was called to order at 10:35 a.m. by Council Chair Sue Vega. Roll call was taken by Secretary Julie Bobitt and it was determined that a quorum was established.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Chair Sue Vega asked Council members for a motion to approve the minutes from the December 9, 2025 meeting. Kim Hunt entered a motion and Sherry Sparks seconded the motion; the motion passed and the minutes were approved.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

IDoA Budget and Finance Manager, Emily Howerton, reported on the IDoA Introduced Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) budget. She shared that the Introduced FY27 Budget totals just over $2.2 billion which is an increase of $175.1 million over FY26. The FY27 Introduced Budget maintains level funding for caregiver support services at $5.3 million and home delivered meals at $63.3 million. An additional $300,000 is budgeted for the Multi-Sector Plan for Aging (MPA) with the Governor proposing $1 million in funding for first year implementation efforts. The Community Care Program (CCP) includes an increase of $166.8 million to support the annualization of the January 2026 rate increase, as well as increases to fund projected caseload growth. The Adult Protective Services (APS) budget includes an increase of $3.3 million to accommodate an increase in intakes, the rising older adult population, quality-based rate modernization, workforce recruitment and retention, federal regulation compliance, and case management system modernization. Emily reminded the Council that these introduced funding levels may be subject to change during the budget period. The IDoA appropriation hearings are scheduled for April 9 in the House and April 15 in the Senate.

Michelle Hoersch, IDoA Chief Planning Officer for the Multi-Sector Plan for Aging (MPA), updated ICoA on the progress of the MPA. *EngAging Illinois,* the MPA, was launched on January 15, 2026. It is a ten-year blueprint bringing together priorities, policies, and programs to reframe how we think about aging in Illinois. Michelle shared that the focus areas of the MPA are creating livable and connected communities, ensuring health for all ages, investing in caregivers, and supporting affordable aging. She said that there were three upcoming initiatives: 1) development of a resource center website, *EngAge Central*, to link users to valuable information and resources; 2) efforts to modernize home and community based services to transform service delivery and data infrastructure; and 3) a statewide academic collaborative on aging that will bring together medical centers, colleges and universities to solve some of the more challenging issues of aging. Michelle shared that *EngAging Illinois* is meant to be a roadmap bringing together stakeholders to support aging well throughout the lifespan in Illinois.

Kelly Richards, IDoA State Long-Term Care Ombudsman, shared the program's statewide initiatives to promote safety and good care in long term care communities. She noted that recent changes in federal requirements related to emergency preparedness policy and procedure require the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP) to educate residents and visit homes to review emergency preparedness plans and ensure that residents are informed. The Regional Ombudsmen have been working with their facilities in their areas to review emergency preparedness procedures, ensuring that they are adequate and inform residents of the plans and the role of the LTCOP in an emergency. This ensures that residents rights are upheld and clarifies the roles of all involved while meeting federal requirements.

ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:

Angela Simmons, Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) Senior Home Administrator, presented information on the five state-run veterans homes in Illinois. IDVA employs more than 1200 team members dedicated to serving Illinois veterans and their families. They assist veterans with navigating state and federal programs, advocating on behalf of the veterans' individual and unique needs. They connect veterans with United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) hospitals and services as well. The five Illinois Veterans' Homes are in Anna, Chicago, LaSalle, Manteno and Quincy and provide person-centered skilled care. Each home is licensed by the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and certified by the VA. The homes provide a supportive environment with a full quality of life and person-directed care for each veteran. The Anna and Quincy homes are the only homes that take spouses, as they have apartment units. She noted that none of the IDVA homes are rehab to home facilities so when veterans move into a VA home, it will be their home for the rest of their lives.

Angela shared information regarding eligibility requirements, monthly costs, and the application process. She said that an admission factor to take into consideration is the ability of the VA home to provide needed care and the availability of a bed in that category of care. Currently, all five homes have waiting lists. Vacancies are filled in chronological order by the date stamp on the application of submission to the facility. Angela explained that Illinois has additional IDVA programs designed to assist veterans with navigating services and benefits they qualify for through statewide offices staffed by Veteran Service Officers (VSOs). The VSO is a fellow veteran who is an expert on all available federal, state and local veteran resources. There is a VSO finder tool on the website https://veterans.illinois.gov that links individuals to the nearest office for assistance.

Angela discussed other programs to benefit veterans, including the lottery game *Winter Winnings. The Winter Winnings Instant Ticket* costs $2 and is sold from November through February. All funds raised by the ticket are distributed by IDVA to veteran service programs in Illinois. A yearly competitive reimbursement grant is administered by the IDVA and offered quarterly to non-profits, tax-exempt entities, and governmental organizations that assist veterans in need. She also shared information about the Illinois Joining Forces Foundation. It is a network of over 200 community organizations that serve veterans and their families in Illinois. They work together to create a "no wrong door" system of support. Their website is http://illinoisjoiningforces.org/ .

Angela shared her email address, angela.simmons@illinois.gov, for more information.

MEDICARE UPDATES:

Sandy Leith, IDoA Senior Health Insurance Program (SHIP) Director, shared Medicare updates with the Council. Illinois has more than 300 SHIP sites with both paid and volunteer staff that help people with Medicare counseling free of charge. The staff at these sites work one on one with beneficiaries to help them understand their insurance choices. Sandy shared that the *2026 Medicare Choices* book is available on the IDoA website to help beneficiaries find the plan that best fits their needs.

Sandy said that beneficiaries need to decide whether to choose original Medicare or a Medicare Advantage Plan. Original Medicare is a government-sponsored health insurance program that has part A (hospital), B (medical) and D (prescription drug coverage) with optional supplemental coverage. The Medicare Advantage Plans, commonly known as part C, are run by private insurance companies. They bundle Part A and B with some including Part D, as well as often providing extra benefits like dental, vision and hearing. Medicare Advantage insurance companies are paid a set dollar amount by Medicare annually for each person enrolled in their plans. The main difference between original Medicare and Medicare Advantage is that when you go to the doctor under original Medicare, the federal government will pay the claim. Under an Advantage Plan, there are networks of providers you must use and the insurance company will pay the claim per their fee structure. There tend to be more denied services through Medicare Advantage Plans. Sandy said beneficiaries should use the appeals process if their services are denied. She added that SHIP sites are also available to help with appealing denied services.

During the Medicare Open Enrollment Period which occurs each year from October 15 to December 7, Medicare beneficiaries may change their Medicare Part D prescription coverage. Sandy shared that SHIP counselors will compare a beneficiary's current list of medications with each plan available to match them with the plan that best fits their needs and is the most affordable. Sandy noted Medicare Part D plans annual deductibles for 2026 range from $0 to $615. After the deductible is met, beneficiaries out-of-pocket costs cap at $2100. Beneficiaries will then pay $0 for their covered Part D prescriptions for the remainder of the calendar year. Sandy noted that during the 2025 Medicare Open Enrollment Period, SHIP counselors conducted one on one counseling sessions with 33,414 people and the average time spent during each counseling session was 53 minutes. She added that during a twelve-month period, SHIP counselors assist more than 95,000 beneficiaries.

Sandy also explained the new Fully Integrated Dual Eligible Special Needs Plans (FIDE SNP). FIDE SNPs are for Illinoisans who receive both Medicaid and Medicare benefits (dually eligible members). Currently, there are four different companies to choose from in Illinois: Aetna, Humana, Molina, and Wellcare. These plans pay a per capita amount for everything that a beneficiary needs from part A and B to their medications, long-term care support and transportation.

Sandy provided Aging.SHIP@illinois.gov for specific questions and more information.

NEW BUSINESS:

None

ADJOURNMENT:

A motion to adjourn was asked for by Chair Sue Vega, a motion was made by Phyllis Mitzen and seconded by Sylvia Mahle.

The meeting adjourned at 12:21 p.m.

Julie Bobitt

Julie Bobitt, Secretary

Illinois Council on Aging