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December 2, 2024

Steven T. James
House Clerk
State House, Room 145
Boston, MA 02133

Michael D. Hurley
Senate Clerk
State House, Room 335
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Clerk James and Clerk Hurley,

Pursuant to Section 12 of Chapter 115A of the Massachusetts General Laws, please find enclosed the annual report from the Office of Veterans Homes and Housing within the Executive Office of Veterans Services (EOVS).

Sincerely,

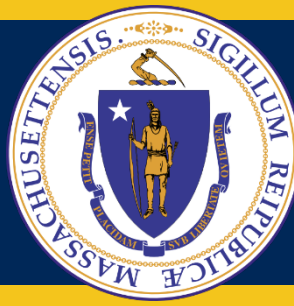
A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jon Santiago".

Jon Santiago

CC:

Senator John Velis, Senate Chair, Joint Committee on Veterans and Federal Affairs
Representative Gerard Cassidy, House Chair, Joint Committee on Veterans and Federal Affairs

Maura T. Healey
Governor
Kimberley Driscoll
Lieutenant Governor



Jon Santiago, MD, MPH
Secretary

State of the Commonwealth's Veterans Homes

November 2024



Executive Office of Veterans Services
Office of Homes and Housing

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Introduction

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts operates two Veterans Homes: the Massachusetts Veterans Home at Chelsea and the Massachusetts Veterans Home at Holyoke, which are collectively referred to in this report as the “Homes.”

The Homes focus on providing long-term care and domiciliary residential services for Massachusetts veterans. Both Homes have a five-member Board of Trustees, each appointed to a seven-year term. The Homes’ mission is to provide services and care to Massachusetts veterans with dignity, honor, and respect.

Pursuant to Section 12 of Chapter 115A of the Massachusetts General Laws, the Office of Veterans Homes and Housing within the Executive Office of Veterans Services (EOVS) must submit an annual report on the state of the Veterans Homes. In accordance, the report shall include the following: (i) the quality of care provided at the Homes; (ii) the financial status of the Homes; (iii) the uniformity of programs at the Homes; (iv) the capital needs of the Homes; and (v) the status of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs’ accreditation.

Overview and Current Initiatives

Since October of 2023, the Homes have made significant strides to professionalize, standardize, and significantly increase the quality of life delivered to residents.

The Executive Office of Veterans Services (EOVS) began on March 1, 2023 with the implementation of Chapter 144 of the Acts of 2022. As a result, the two Massachusetts Veterans Homes (MVH) and their executive directors report to and are under the direct control of the EOVS Secretary. The Act also changed the responsibilities of the local boards, created a statewide veterans council, established the Executive Office of Homes and Housing, created an ombudsperson role for each MVH, directed that each MVH be licensed by the MA Department of Public Health (DPH) and certified by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) as long-term care facilities and renamed them as Veterans Homes. Both Homes have recently become licensed by DPH and are now managed by experienced nursing home administrators. This year, the veterans and staff at the MVH at Chelsea have moved into a new facility and a new facility at Holyoke is scheduled to be opened in 2026.

Progress has also been made to professionalize the Homes through implementing an Electronic Medical Record (EMR) system. The EMR supports improved coordination of resident care while easing administrative burdens. In addition to operational efficiency, the EMR supports continuing enhancements of the quality of care through improved documentation, more effective clinical communication, increased oversight, and expanded metric-based data collection. The EMR was implemented at MVH at Holyoke in September 2024 and at Chelsea in November 2024.

Another significant initiative is the comprehensive review and evaluation of all policies and procedures at both Homes done in partnership with a professional consultant. The objective of this initiative is to establish a single comprehensive policy and procedure framework to further support the operational and clinical practice standardization across both Homes. The new policy framework will comply with the requirements and structure of CMS, DPH and the VA along with long-term care best practices. This transformational initiative also includes the training of staff at both Homes as well as an inventory and analysis of all current policies.

We have also implemented the EOVS Ombudsperson program. The Ombudsperson at each Home receives reports, investigates, and resolves complaints from residents, their representatives, and Homes personnel. Ombudspeople operate within the Homes but are independent from the Home, reporting directly to EOVS. Ombudspeople are well respected by staff and residents at each Home. This important function supports the quality of life for our residents, supports staff, and identifies opportunities for ongoing improvement within the Homes.

To further invest in frontline staff, EOVS worked with SEIU 888 to implement a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) to establish a career ladder for Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) at both Homes. This joint initiative equitably recognizes qualified bargaining unit staff and provides CNAs an opportunity for career advancement within their field. The MOA delineates the creation of position descriptions, staffing needs assessments at each Home, and the promotion process for eligible employees. It also memorializes the position descriptions that will be used for all levels of the Nursing Assistant job series, addresses current staffing needs at the Home, and describes the

reclassification and promotion process moving forward. For over 30 years, CNAs at the Massachusetts Veterans Homes have primarily been classified at the entry-level CNA 1 position, with only a few reaching CNA 2 level. With the introduction of the nursing assistant career ladder, employees will now progress through four levels of the CNA job series based on their skills, experience, and responsibilities.

The Homes continue to focus on equity, including regional equity, staff diversity, and veteran access. In reviewing regional equity, the Homes are working to engage and attract veteran residents throughout the entire state. The Homes are also exploring options to increase staff diversity and support existing staff through career pathways.

Overview of the Massachusetts Veterans Home at Chelsea

The Massachusetts Veteran Home (MVH) Chelsea opened its doors to Massachusetts veterans in 1882 as the first veterans home in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Chelsea offers veterans high-quality long-term and skilled nursing care, domiciliary housing and support services. The MVH at Chelsea has a total of 154 long-term care beds and 125 domiciliary beds. All residents who had resided in Chelsea's Quigley Medical Hospital were transferred to the new facility between October 2023 and February 2024. The design of the new facility creates a home-like environment, enhancing resident comfort and privacy while offering more common space to interact and socialize. These new features, amenities, and designs are based on the VA Small Homes model, providing a better quality of life for veterans and their families.

MVH at Chelsea achieved licensure from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH), certification from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) in September 2023, and recognition by the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in December 2023. In addition, Chelsea brought in new leadership this year. The new Executive Director and a Deputy Executive Director, both of whom are licensed nursing home administrators, bring nearly 40 years of experience to the Home.

The domiciliary campus at the MVH Chelsea is also undergoing significant investment and evolution through a public-private partnership redevelopment with Pennrose LLC. The redevelopment project will result in a complete renovation of the domiciliary campus and the creation of approximately 240 100% veterans' preference affordable housing units. The project will accommodate all current domiciliary residents in the new housing units and will offer new, state-of-the-art living quarters for veterans.

Overview of the Massachusetts Veterans Home at Holyoke

The MVH at Holyoke opened in 1952, offering veterans high-quality long-term and skilled nursing care. The current facility has a total of 128 long-term care beds. The MVH at Holyoke is building a replacement facility with \$263.5 million in federal funding from the VA and \$141.9 million in funding from the Commonwealth. With the support of the Department of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM), the building is in the steel infrastructure phase and is scheduled for occupancy in 2026. In addition to the major facility replacement capital project, the Home has also completed several capital repairs to the roof and façade of the current buildings.

The MVH at Holyoke achieved licensure from DPH in July 2024. In support of this accomplishment, staff of the MVH at Holyoke enhanced their understanding of and compliance with strict and rigorous regulatory standards and implemented new policies and procedures. In addition, Holyoke has completed their initial application for certification as a nursing home with CMS and is actively working on the final readiness phase with physical plant improvements.

Quality of Care

The Homes' Quality Assurance and Performance Improvement (QAPI) program is a data-driven, comprehensive system that combines quality assurance (QA) and performance improvement (PI) to continuously monitor and enhance the quality of care and services. The primary goal of QAPI is to improve the quality of life for our veteran residents. This is done by identifying areas for improvement, implementing systematic changes, and tracking their effectiveness. Progress is tracked through ongoing monitoring and reporting. Input for the process includes resident feedback through the resident council, town halls, family council, resident satisfaction surveys and a grievance process. The QAPI also considers clinical quality measures based on care, outcomes, and insights gained from the independent surveys conducted by DPH, CMS, and VA.

Each Home has a QAPI team that meets monthly. The QAPI committee is multi-disciplinary and promotes active participation from all departments, including management and line staff. The QAPI team identifies targeted initiatives to address specific issues using data collection, analysis, intervention, and evaluation. Initiatives are reviewed, crafted, implemented, and monitored to assess their effectiveness. This is an integral component of a continuous process of quality improvement to ensure our veteran residents with the highest quality of life and to improve their satisfaction.

The EOVS Quality Management team provides support and oversight to each Home's QAPI program. Through a recently developed dashboard, key metrics, initiatives and accomplishments are shared with EOVS. The Homes develop annual program plans for their QAPI initiatives, presenting progress on initiatives to the EOVS Secretary on quarterly basis. QAPI information is also shared with the Homes Board of Trustees and the Statewide Homes Council.

QAPI is an ongoing journey of improvement and is beginning to show results. Several examples of this past year's QAPI focus include aiming for reductions in falls and skin injuries. Through comprehensive efforts of the entire team, there has been a reduction in total falls and a reduction in skin injuries by 30% at Holyoke compared to last year.

Additionally, an important quality indicator is resident and family satisfaction. Confidential surveys are conducted monthly by an independent nationally recognized health care survey agency, Pinnacle Quality Insights. Chelsea achieved a favorability rating of 94% and Holyoke reached 100% for the year. This metric measures the percentage of respondents who would recommend care at the Home. The overall annual satisfaction rating for Chelsea was 4.5 and Holyoke was 4.9 on a 5.0 scale. These are two of the more significant metrics used to evaluate overall customer satisfaction and both Homes have achieved results that are higher than national averages.

Financial Status

The Massachusetts Veterans Homes are funded through the Commonwealth’s annual General Appropriations Act (“GAA”) on an annual basis. All reimbursements received from residents and/or the U.S. Veterans Administration (VA) (except for a small amount of retained revenues) revert to the Commonwealth’s general fund to offset the operating costs. Daily care charges may be waived or reduced based on monthly income or certain qualifying disabilities.

Financial Status of the Massachusetts Veterans Home at Chelsea

The MVH at Chelsea received an appropriation of \$52 million in FY2024 which includes staffing of 400 full-time employees and revenue of \$10.5 million.

Appropriation Number	Appropriation Name	FY 24 GAA
4190-0010	Administration and Operations	51,351,027
4180-1100	Retained Revenue	600,000
	Total	\$51,951,027

Revenue Source	Revenue Source Description	FY 24 GAA
3504	Reimb - Blue Cross Blue Shield	1,506
3505	Reimb - Other Insurance	3,616
3506	Reimb - Direct Patient Payer	1,326,238
3508	Free Meals	25,000
3545	Reimb - Medicare Part D	108,347
4531	Sale of Special Plates	600,000
5203	Medicare Reimbursement	12,668
5204	VA Per Diem Domiciliary Care	2,256,336
5205	VA Per Diem Long Term Care	6,137,150
6900	Miscellaneous	30,000
	Total	\$10,500,861

Financial Status of the Massachusetts Veterans Home at Holyoke

The MVH at Holyoke received an appropriation of \$30 million in FY2024 which includes staffing of 356 full-time employees and revenue of \$6.7 million.

Appropriation Number	Appropriation Name	FY 24 GAA
4190-0010	Administration and Operations	28,728,578
4190-0103	Canteen Retained Revenue	50,000
4190-0300	12 Bed Retained Revenue	824,198
4180-1100	Retained Revenue	400,000
	Total	\$30,002,776

Revenue Source	Revenue Source Description	FY 24 GAA
3505	Reimb - Other Insurance	1,677
3506	Reimb - Direct Patient Payer	685,500
3508	Free Meals	30,000
3545	Reimb - Medicare Part D	76,985
4000	Occupancy/Rent Fees	75,000
4033	Agent Rental Service Fee	1,500
4500	Miscellaneous Sales	400
4531	Sale of Special Plates	400,000
4556	Holyoke Canteen Revenue	50,000
5205	VA Per Diem Long Term Care	5,342,034
6900	Miscellaneous	12,000
	Total	\$6,675,096

Uniformity of Programs

The Homes are licensed by DPH as long-term care facilities and recognized by the VA State Veterans Home Program as nursing homes. Both Homes are making significant efforts to enhance uniformity, achieving compliance with rigorous standards and regulations set by DPH, CMS and VA. Progress can be measured through annual unannounced surveys conducted by both the DPH and VA to ensure compliance.

The Homes operate a new model of care, known as resident-centered care, that aligns with the VA Small Home design. Each Home provides comprehensive and compassionate care which is tailored to the unique needs of each veteran resident. The Homes offer a holistic model of care to ensure that each resident receives the support they need to maximize their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. They also offer a range of social, recreational, and therapeutic activities tailored to each veteran's interests and abilities, including music therapy, arts and crafts, fitness programs, and opportunities for spiritual support through religious services. All of this combines to provide the highest quality of life for each of our veteran residents.

As described earlier in this report, EOVS has also initiated a comprehensive review process of all policies and procedures utilizing an outside consultant. This process will further enhance uniformity of policies, procedures, and care, as well as facilitate the implementation of these enhancements. The implementation of an EMR at both homes will also add to more uniformity.

The new MVH at Chelsea facility was constructed based on the VA Small Homes model. This is an architectural style that puts residents at the center of care. This design moves away from the more traditional medical/institutional layouts that maximize operational efficiency, resulting in a more home-like environment. The new facility at MVH Holyoke is being constructed using the same design standards. With the completion of the new facility at MVH Holyoke, both Homes will be built in accordance with the VA Small Homes model.

To further the objective of supporting improved professionalism and standardization, EOVS Office of Homes and Housing provides oversight, guidance, and support to both Homes. The office is staffed with health care professionals with expertise and years of experience in health care management, organizational transformation, strategic planning, workforce development, quality improvement, and regulatory compliance.

Capital Needs

Capital Needs at the Massachusetts Veterans Home at Chelsea

This year, veteran residents of the MVH at Chelsea long-term care facility moved into the new, state-of-the-art, 154-bed replacement facility. With major construction and move-in completed, the Home is working with DCAMM to complete several minor outstanding items. The next phase of the project will include the demolition of the old facility and site work to include green space and restore access to Malone Park. The domiciliary is also undergoing a capital project to renovate the domiciliary kitchen to expand the residents' dietary program.

The MVH at Chelsea pursued a public-private partnership to improve the domiciliary portion of its campus, announcing Pennrose as the domiciliary campus redevelopment partner in September 2021. In November 2021, DCAMM and Pennrose executed a Provisional Designation Agreement, a License of Entry, and completed a Master Development Agreement on October 28, 2022. The redevelopment calls for 100% veterans' preference across all independent housing units. The redevelopment plan will accommodate the current domiciliary residents into the new housing units.

Capital Needs at the Massachusetts Veterans Home at Holyoke

The MVH at Holyoke, with the support of DCAMM, is in the process of constructing a replacement facility with \$263.5 million in federal funding from the VA and \$141.9 million in funding from the Commonwealth. The new building will have eight floors with the capacity to house 234 veterans. In addition, Holyoke will be enhancing their service delivery to include an adult day health program with a planned capacity to serve 40-50 veterans. It is estimated that the new building will be ready for occupation in late 2026 with full project completion, including demolition of the current building, by 2028.

The MVH at Holyoke has also completed important projects in the existing facility, including the completion of a 4-bed negative pressure isolation unit for care of residents with transmissible diseases, brick work, and roof repair.

Status of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs Accreditation

Both Homes have achieved full certification from the VA and currently participate in the VA State Veterans Home Program. As part of this certification, VA surveys each Home annually to ensure they continue to meet VA standards. Both Homes have been surveyed in 2024, achieving certification and maintaining recognition from the VA as fully compliant facilities.

The new MVH at Chelsea was formally recognized and certified by the VA in March 2024, following the significant accomplishment of achieving a deficiency free survey in December 2023. The survey included all quality of care, life safety code standards, and VA long term care regulations.

The VA conducted its annual survey of the Chelsea domiciliary service in January 2024. Of the 190 standards, 7 deficient practices were noted. The VA provided the domiciliary with provisional certification in April 2024 following acceptance of the corrective action plan.

The VA also conducted its annual survey of the Holyoke nursing home program in January 2024. There were 5 deficiencies cited, none of which were clinical in nature nor of high scope or severity. The VA provided full certification in August 2024 following acceptance of the corrective action plan.

Conclusion

The Massachusetts Veterans Homes at Chelsea and Holyoke have continued to make tremendous strides in resident care, professionalization, and operational improvements over this last year. Homes leadership and staff continue to improve resident care and quality of life through new initiatives including the construction of two new facilities, the implementation of the Ombudsperson program, a renewed focus on resident and staff equity, and the CNA career ladder.

Both Homes continue to work toward uniformity through implementing EMR, developing and implementing standardized policies, and creating QAPI teams. Each has made progress on capital needs demonstrated by the recent completion of the new facility at Chelsea, the beginning of construction of a new facility at Holyoke and achieving new milestones in planning for the redevelopment of the Chelsea domiciliary campus. Lastly, both Homes have achieved and maintain full certification with the VA State Homes program.

The Healey Driscoll administration looks forward to implementing further improvements and attaining even newer heights in providing services and care to Massachusetts veterans with dignity, honor, and respect.