



**VETERANS ASSISTANCE COMMISSION OF COOK COUNTY
FY25 ANNUAL REPORT**

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December 29, 2025

The Honorable J.B. Pritzker

Governor of Illinois

State Capital Room 207 Springfield,
Illinois 62706-0001

Dear Governor Pritzker,

Pursuant to Section 330 ILCS 45/8 of the Illinois Military Veterans Assistance Act, it is my privilege to submit the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County's Fiscal Year 2025 Annual Report for your review.

As the sole Veteran specific agency in Cook County authorized to provide direct and immediate financial assistance, we remain steadfast in supporting Cook County Veterans and their families during times of financial hardship. Our mission continues to guide our work, ensuring that services are delivered with compassion, accountability, and measurable impact.

In Fiscal Year 2025, the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County disbursed \$849,822.95 in direct financial assistance representing a 30 percent increase over the \$652,153.89 provided in Fiscal Year 2024. This significant growth reflects both the rising needs within the Veteran community and our enhanced capacity to respond effectively and efficiently.

Through these efforts, 3,428 Cook County Veterans received direct financial assistance in FY25, ensuring access to critical support and stability during periods of economic distress. Each of these engagements represents our commitment to preserving dignity, preventing crisis escalation, and supporting long term well being for those who have served.

As we look ahead, the progress realized in FY25 serves as a strong foundation for continued growth. Through sustained advocacy, operational enhancements, and targeted program implementation, the Commission remains focused on expanding access, strengthening outcomes, and maximizing the return of these investments to Cook County's Veteran community.

We are grateful for your continued support and partnership. Together, we remain committed to honoring the service and sacrifice of Illinois Veterans by ensuring they receive the support they have earned.

Respectfully submitted,

E Soto

Elizabeth D. Soto
Superintendent

I. MISSION STATEMENT

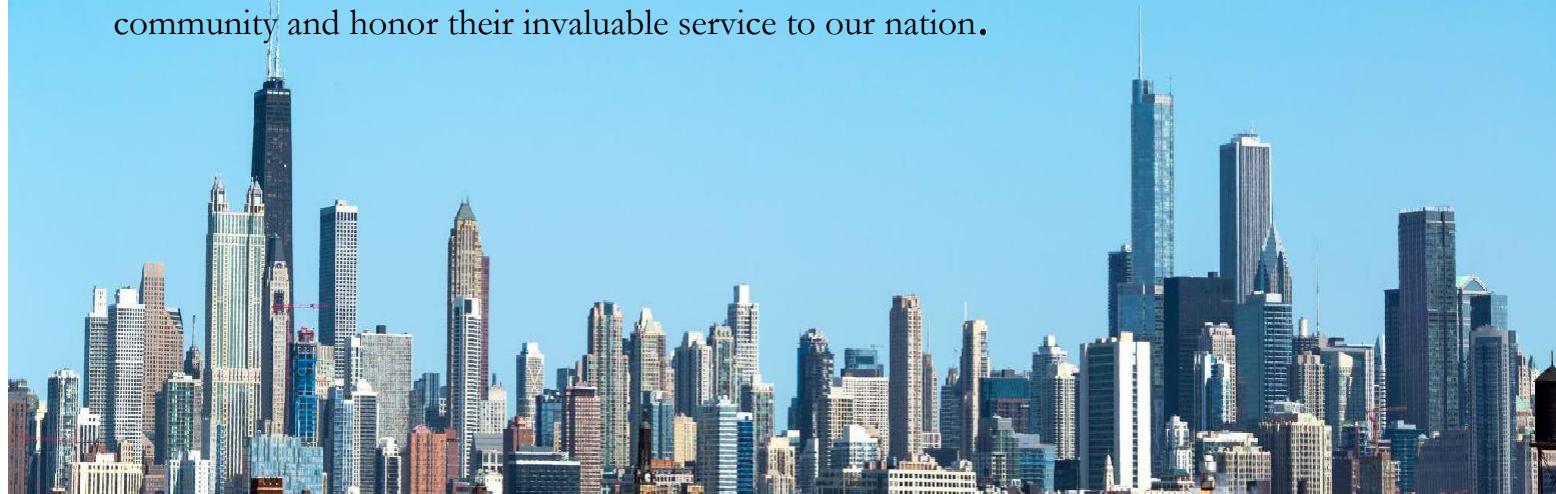


OUR MISSION

The Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County is committed to serving as the leading provider of immediate financial assistance and comprehensive support services for Cook County Veterans and their families. Through timely intervention and effective, results-driven advocacy, we ensure prompt access to all available benefits and resources.

With commitment and dedication, the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County continues to be the trusted partner that our Veteran community can rely on for assistance. In addition to our financial aid programs, we are committed to delivering non-financial services and identifying other emerging needs the Veteran community may have.

By continuously improving our services and advocating for the rights and well-being of Cook County Veterans and their families, we contribute to the betterment of our Veteran community and honor their invaluable service to our nation.



II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County (VACCC) is designed to assist and provide immediate financial assistance to eligible Cook County, Illinois Veterans in need, who have served in the United States Armed Forces. The VACCC is committed to efficiently and effectively delivering these services, recognizing the importance of timely support and assistance to meet their needs.

The following outlines the categories of assistance provided in Fiscal Year 2025 and the time frames in which these services were administered by the VACCC to eligible and qualified Veterans:

- **Rental/ Mortgage Assistance:** To support housing stability, the VACCC provided immediate financial assistance toward Veterans' rent or mortgage obligations. **Beginning in Fiscal Year 2025, the maximum benefit was increased to \$2,000.00** to align with cost-of-living (COLA) increases for the year. This assistance was applied to past-due rental or mortgage payments or used as a first-month payment for a new rental or mortgage.

This benefit could be requested by an eligible and qualified Veteran once, every 12-month time period.

- **Utility Assistance:** To provide support in this area, the VACCC offered immediate financial assistance towards Veteran's utility bills. This benefit offered eligible and qualified Veterans up to \$550.00 in financial assistance towards each individual past due electric, gas, and/or water utility bill(s).

This benefit could be requested by an eligible and qualified Veteran once, every 12-month time period.

- **Food Assistance:** To address emergency food insecurity, the VACCC continued to provide immediate food assistance. **Beginning in Fiscal Year 2025, the food assistance benefit was increased to \$200.00 per Veteran and \$200.00 for each qualifying dependent** in order to better align with rising food costs and household needs.

This assistance was provided through Aldi store gift cards and was intended to help stabilize households during periods of acute food insecurity. In recognition that emergency assistance alone is not a long term solution, Veterans and their families were also encouraged to explore additional resources, including local food pantries, community based programs, as well as state and federal assistance programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

This benefit could be requested by a Veteran once, every 6-month time period.

- **Public Transportation Assistance:** Reliable transportation for Veterans to access medical appointments, educational institutions, and workplaces is of upmost importance. To support Veterans transportation needs, the VACCC offered eligible and qualified Veterans free CTA (Chicago Transit Authority) and PACE single or 7-day transportation cards. These cards served as a means of travel, enabling Veterans to secure transportation for their medical, school and/or work-related needs.

By providing these transportation cards, the VACCC aimed to alleviate the financial burden of travel expenses and enable Veterans to reach their destinations safely, while ensuring they have the means to attend crucial appointments.

This benefit could be requested by a Veteran on a weekly basis, or as needed.

- **Vehicle Gas Cards (Alternate Transportation):** Access to reliable personal transportation was additionally essential for Veterans to attend medical appointments, maintain employment, pursue educational opportunities, and meet other critical obligations in FY25. To support Veterans who relied on personal vehicles, the VACCC provided eligible and qualified Veterans with gas cards to offset fuel costs associated with essential travel.

This assistance helped reduce transportation related financial barriers, ensuring Veterans could safely and reliably travel to medical facilities, workplaces, educational institutions, and other required destinations. By offering gas card assistance, the VACCC supported continuity of care, employment stability, and overall self-sufficiency.

This benefit could be requested by a Veteran once every 12-month time period.

- **Hygiene Assistance:** The VACCC's Emergency Hygiene Card program supported eligible Cook County Veterans and their qualifying dependents by providing access to essential hygiene products. Each Hygiene Card carried a value of **\$100.00**, helping to reduce barriers related to personal care and household hygiene needs.

Beginning in Fiscal Year 2025, the frequency of this benefit was increased to once every six (6) months, enhancing the Commission's ability to respond to ongoing hygiene needs throughout the year.

- **Work Attire Assistance:** The VACCC recognized the importance of professional attire when pursuing gainful employment. To support Veterans in their job search efforts, we offered work attire assistance. Through this benefit, eligible and qualified Veterans received a \$100.00 Walmart store gift card to assist with the purchase of new clothing for confirmed interviews.

This benefit could be requested by a Veteran once, every 12-month time period.

- **Internet Bill Assistance:** Introduced in Fiscal Year 2025, the Internet Bill Assistance program was established to support Veterans' access to reliable internet services, which are essential for healthcare access, employment, education, and communication. Through this benefit, the VACCC provided eligible and qualified Veterans with financial assistance to help offset the cost of monthly internet service.

By addressing connectivity barriers, this assistance enabled Veterans to participate in telehealth appointments, complete job applications, access educational platforms, and remain connected to critical support services.

This benefit could be requested by an eligible Veteran once, every 12-month time period.

- **Funeral/ Burial Assistance:** The VACCC recognizes the profound emotional and financial burden families may face following the passing of a Veteran. To provide meaningful support during this difficult time, the VACCC offered funeral and burial assistance to the next of kin, immediate family member, or Power of Attorney of a deceased Veteran.

Beginning in Fiscal Year 2025, the maximum funeral and burial assistance benefit was increased to \$3,000.00 in response to rising funeral costs and the demonstrated need for enhanced support. This assistance helped offset expenses associated with funeral and burial services, ensuring Veterans were honored with dignity and respect.

- **Phone Bill Assistance:** Introduced in Fiscal Year 2025, the Phone Bill Assistance program was implemented to ensure Veterans maintain uninterrupted access to phone services, a vital lifeline for medical coordination, employment opportunities, emergency communication, and connection to family and support networks.

Through this benefit, the provided eligible and qualified Veterans with financial assistance toward their monthly phone service costs. By reducing the risk of service interruption, this program helped Veterans remain reachable and engaged with essential services and resources.

This benefit could be requested by an eligible Veteran once, every 12-month time period.

- **Records:** In addition to direct financial assistance, the VACCC played a critical role in records access and documentation support during FY25. Veterans received assistance obtaining certified copies of DD214 discharge documents through the National Personnel Records Center, as well as expedited access to records through established partnerships with the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs. The Commission also assisted Veterans and families in securing certified Cook County records, including birth, marriage, and death certificates, ensuring timely access to documentation necessary for benefits, legal matters, and administrative needs through our partnership with the Cook County Clerk's Office .

III. ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

The Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County operates under the legal framework established by the Veterans and Service Members (330 ILCS 45/) Military Veterans Assistance Act (MVAA).

In addition to the MVAA, the VACCC's Executive Board, Membership Delegates, and Alternates play a key role in supporting VACCC operations, with Delegates and Alternates serving in an advisory capacity by providing recommendations to help guide VAC operations.

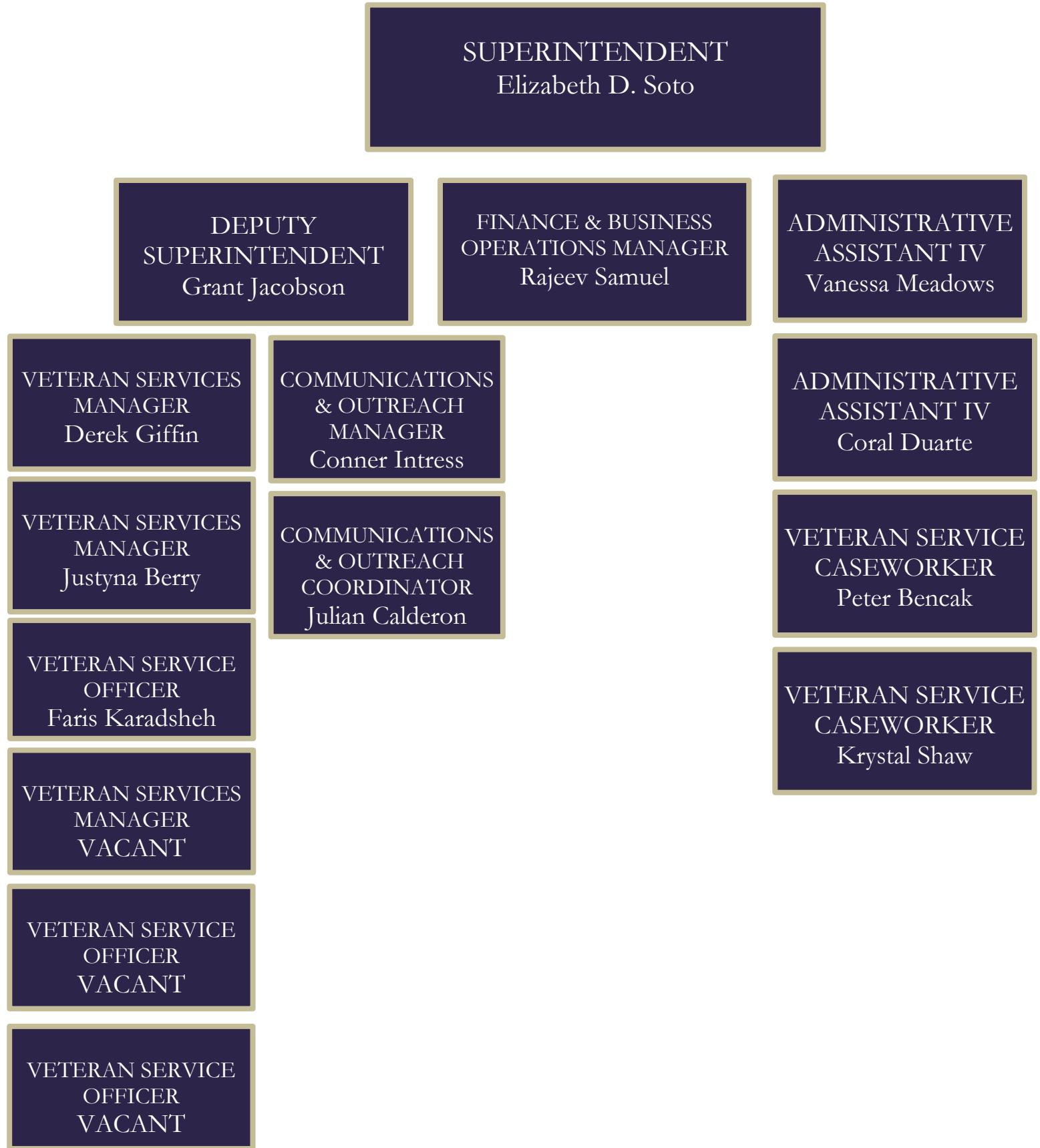
The VACCC's operations are also governed by various regulatory documents and ordinances. These include the VACCC By-Laws, the VACCC Office Policies and Procedures, and the Cook County's "Ordinance Regarding the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County."

To ensure additional ethical conduct and accountability, the VACCC adheres to the Cook County's Ethics Ordinance and the Office of the Independent Inspector General Ordinance. These ordinances set standards for transparency, integrity, and proper governance.

Furthermore, the VACCC complies with applicable established Cook County policies, which may include policies related to compensation, employee rights, procurement, and budget.

By following these legal and regulatory frameworks, the VACCC upholds the highest standards of professionalism, transparency, and ethical behavior in its operations. These guidelines ensure that the VACCC operates within the legal boundaries and maintains the trust and confidence of the Veteran community it serves.

IV. FY25 ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



V. EXECUTIVE BOARD & MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATIONS

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS:

PRESIDENT	Frank Gutierrez
FIRST VICE PRESIDENT	Bill Browne
SECOND VICE PRESIDENT	Dutch DeGroot
FINANCE OFFICER	Robert Arciola
JUDGE ADVOCATE	Pete Hurt
SERGEANT-AT-ARMS	Ran Tyner
CHAPLAIN	Kevin Ake
SECRETARY	Jim Parker
MEMBER-AT-LARGE	Greg Jacobs
MEMBER-AT-LARGE	Chuy Garcia
MEMBER-AT-LARGE	Evamarie Duff

MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATIONS:

American Legion Post 36

Delegate – Patrick Flannigan
Alternate – Gregory Jacobs

American Legion Post 87

Delegate – Dr. Wille Mack
Alternate – Ashley Shine

American Legion Post 96

Delegate – Victor Sarmiento
Alternate – Eddy Portillo

American Legion Post 104

Delegate – Dennis Chavez
Alternate – Michael F. Tuman

American Legion Post 183

Delegate – Peter Papuc
Alternate – Timothy Bodkin

American Legion Post 208

Delegate – Greg Padovani
Alternate – Walter Parus

American Legion Post 216

Delegate – Kevin Ake
Alternate – VACANT

American Legion Post 335	Delegate – Lorenzo Fiorentino
American Legion Post 478	Alternate – Chuy Garcia
American Legion Post 525	Delegate – Beverly Fitch
American Legion Post 615	Alternate – Nikola Rogers
American Legion Post 687	Delegate – William Starr
American Legion Post 758	Alternate – Laura Matuszak
American Legion Post 806	Delegate – Ken McClory
American Legion Post 829	Alternate – John Kaminecki
American Legion Post 888	Delegate – Eugene Weaver
American Legion Post 923	Alternate – Alejandro Segoviano
American Legion Post 943	Delegate – Beau D. Butts
American Legion Post 973	Alternate – Frank Gutierrez
	Delegate – Al Pizarro
	Alternate – Pete Hirt
	Delegate – Chevonne Woodward
	Alternate – Ray Doekson
	Delegate – Anthony Muro
	Alternate – Andy Anderson
	Delegate – Clemente E. Rodriguez
	Alternate – VACANT
	Delegate – John Steciw
	Alternate – Adam Bihun
	Delegate – Eden Puente
	Alternate – VACANT

American Legion Post 974	Delegate – Anthony Siciliano Alternate – Thomas Zito
American Legion Post 1052	Delegate – Megan Everett Alternate – Brian Phenegar
American Legion Post 1932	Delegate – Charles Salley Alternate – James McGee Jr.
American Legion Post 1941	Delegate – Robert Stoltz Alternate – Edward Krzeminski
American Legion Post 1983	Delegate – Frank Kelly Alternate – Antony Thomas
American Legion Post 1987	Delegate – Charles Henderson Alternate – Ron Bellamy
AMVETS Post 66	Delegate – James Schultz Alternate – Jim Parker
AMVETS Post 268	Delegate – Eddie Brown, Jr. Alternate – Richard Nielson
DAV Chapter 33	Delegate – Todd Moore Alternate – Joseph J. Donovan
DAV Chapter 84	Delegate – Kenneth Boor Alternate – William Byers
Jewish War Veterans	Delegate – Dr. Jerry Field Alternate – Dennis Kane
Marine Corps League Det. 553	Delegate – Randall L. Tyner Alternate – Paul Zogg

Marine Corps League Det. 1408	Delegate – George Gandara Alternate – Alejandro Morales
Military Order of the World Wars	Delegate – Zhi Cheng Chen Alternate – VACANT
MOAA	Delegate – Matthew Garrison Alternate – Roman Golash
Navy League Chapter 69	Delegate – Leo Alicea Alternate – VACANT
PVA Vaughan Chapter	Delegate – Robert Arciola Alternate – Robert Statum
PLAV 72	Delegate – David Piecuch Alternate – VACANT
Special Forces Assoc. Chapter 37	Delegate – Michael F. Tuman Alternate – Patrick Crimmins
VFW Post 311	Delegate – Bill Browne Alternate – Aretha Spurlock
VFW Post 981	Delegate – Stewart Abbink Alternate – Larry Blieski
VFW Post 1337	Delegate – Dutch DeGroot Alternate – Wally Beckman
VFW Post 2202	Delegate – John Healy Alternate – Joseph Wein
VFW Post 2868	Delegate – Eric Morales Alternate – Evamarie Duff

VFW Post 2978	Delegate – Ray Doeksen
	Alternate – Scott Friedland
VFW Post 3579	Delegate – Keith Renner
	Alternate – Ramon Prieto
VFW Post 5079	Delegate – Tom Hoskinson
	Alternate – Anthony Munoz
VFW Post 5151	Delegate – Phil “Chappy” Ferrer
	Alternate – VACANT
VFW Post 5979	Delegate – Richard Wojewnik
	Alternate – David Ruiz
VFW Post 7186	Delegate – Thomas J. Hughes
	Alternate – Elliott Jones
VFW Post 8322	Delegate – Paul J. Bezazian
	Alternate – Paul Knudtson
VFW Post 9284	Delegate – Arthur J. Ellingsen
	Alternate – Wallace Campbell
VFW Post 10778	Delegate – Chuck Bosko
	Alternate – VACANT
VVA Chapter 242	Delegate – Kevin Calkins
	Alternate – John Andres

VI. OFFICE SUMMARY



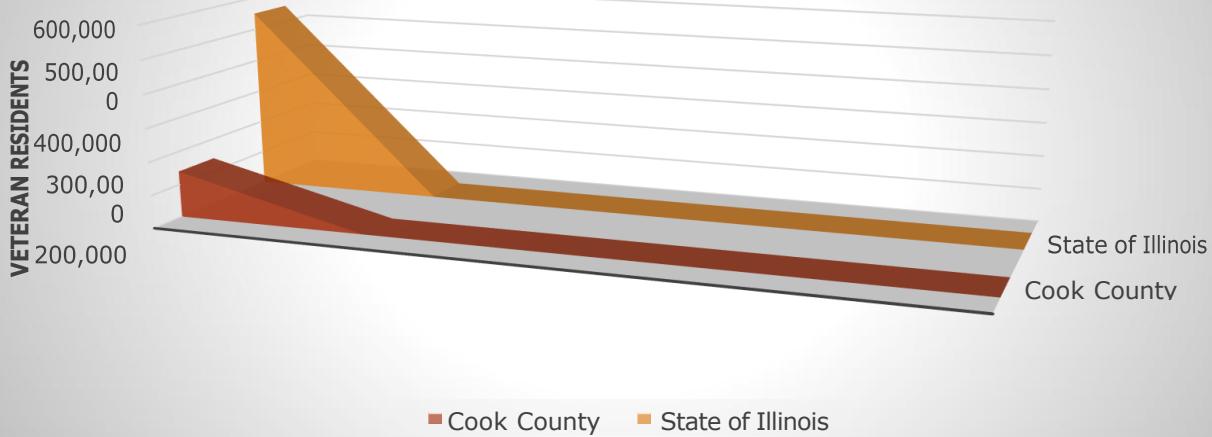
VAC HHC (Hamilton Headquarters Chicago) Office – 1100 S. Hamilton Ave. Chicago, IL.

In 2025, the VACCC operated with 12 full time staff members, a highly dedicated and mission driven team responsible for serving the largest Veteran populations in the State of Illinois. Despite operating with limited staffing relative to the size and complexity of the population served, the VACCC staff worked collaboratively to ensure continuity of operations and the delivery of essential services to Cook County Veterans and their families.

The VACCC team was entrusted with delivering direct emergency financial assistance, Veteran Service Officer (VSO) claims support, and comprehensive outreach services to Veterans across Cook County. Staff members brought specialized knowledge, professionalism, and compassion to their work, ensuring Veterans received timely and dignified assistance during moments of financial hardship, benefit navigation, and crisis.

According to the July 2024 Veteran Census, the State of Illinois was home to approximately 500,000 Veterans, with nearly 140,000 Veterans residing in Cook County. This highlighted both the magnitude of need and the critical role the VACCC and staff played in ensuring access to services and benefits for Veterans in Cook County.

FY23 VETERAN POPULATION



Veterans by State 2024. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/cookcountyillinois/PST045223>

A significant milestone was achieved in the fourth quarter of FY25 with the opening of the VAC CRO (Chicago Regional Office). This new location was intentionally established to provide a discreet, safe, and supportive environment for Veterans seeking assistance with Military Sexual Trauma (MST) claims and other special-emphasis VA claims, where privacy, sensitivity, and trust are paramount.



VAC CRO – 69 W. Washington St. Chicago, IL

The opening of the VAC CRO represented an extraordinary operational achievement and a meaningful expansion of access points for Veterans in their time of need. By increasing the number of physical locations where Veterans can safely seek assistance, the VACCC strengthened our ability to meet Veterans where they are, both geographically and personally while reducing barriers to care and benefits access.

Operating with a limited but deeply committed workforce, the VACCC continued to demonstrate that strategic growth, thoughtful service delivery, and Veteran-centered planning can yield significant impact.

VII. OUTREACH

The Role of Outreach in Fulfilling VACCC's Mission

In FY25 the VACCC served as a vital resource for the county's Veteran community, providing emergency financial support, claims and benefits advocacy, and coordinated connections to essential partner services across Cook County. While these programs form the foundation of our work, the Outreach Program was the engine that ensured these resources reached the Veterans who needed them most. Outreach is not an auxiliary function of the VACCC, it is the primary means by which organization translates its mission into real and measurable impact throughout the county.

The Outreach Program operated on the belief that Veterans should not have to fight to access assistance. Many faced barriers, geographic, logistical, financial, or informational that made traditional government services difficult to navigate. The VAC Outreach team was purposeful in removing those barriers by delivering services directly to Veterans, embedding our staff within their communities, and creating multiple pathways to access support. Whether that was through direct assistance by being physically in their neighborhoods, or through the digital and physical marketing materials we distributed across the community. Through this work, outreach transformed the VACCC from a static service provider into an active, responsive presence in the lives of Cook County Veterans and their families.

Community-Embedded Office Hours: Bringing Services into Neighborhoods

Cook County's size and diversity required outreach strategies that were flexible, widespread, and community centered. Veterans resided in busy urban neighborhoods, quiet suburban streets, and small unincorporated areas each with unique needs and challenges. A "one-size-fits-all" model did not work in a county of this scale. In response, the VACCC adopted a countywide engagement model built on intentional, localized presence. Rather than relying solely on Veterans to seek us out, the Outreach Program brought the VACCC into the

neighborhoods where people already gathered. This approach helped bridge longstanding accessibility gaps and ensured that Veterans, regardless of their zip code, had equitable access to the support they earned.

One of the most transformative developments in VACCC outreach was the establishment of rotating office hours throughout Cook County. These office hours were hosted in locations that Veterans trusted and frequently visited, such as:

- Commissioner and Aldermanic offices
- Township Halls and Municipal buildings
- Libraries, community centers, and senior facilities
- Nonprofit service centers and organizations serving vulnerable populations
- Veteran Service Organizations such as VFW's and American Legion Posts

These locations functioned as fully operational service sites, not just information tables. During office hours, VACCC staff assisted Veterans with emergency financial assistance, claims and benefits questions, referrals to partner agencies, and guidance on navigating complex systems. Staff provided personalized support, took time to understand the Veteran's full situation, and ensured that every individual left with a clear plan or next step.

This model built trust through visibility and consistency. Veterans learned that support was available regularly and locally, while community partners gained a reliable resource embedded directly within their service environment.

From Outreach to “Inreach”: A Hands-On Model of Service Delivery

Traditional outreach often focuses on presence and visibility , attending community events, distributing materials, or participating in fairs. While these efforts remain important for public awareness, they do not always provide Veterans with meaningful or timely assistance.

Many may leave an event informed but still without a clear path forward, especially when their needs are immediate or complex. Recognizing this gap, the VACCC adopted a more engaged, personal, and holistic approach to service delivery, what we describe as **“Inreach.”** This model went far beyond providing general information. Every outreach staff member, whether a Veteran Service Officer (VSO), caseworker, or dedicated outreach personnel, was trained to triage any Veteran who approached them, regardless of the setting.

Staff met Veterans where they were, sat with them at the table, and worked one-on-one to understand the full scope of their situation. They helped Veterans navigate benefits questions, identify urgent financial concerns, and assessed needs that fell outside VACCC direct services. This approach ensured that no Veteran was turned away or left uncertain about their next steps.

While VSO’s remained a foundational pillar of the VACCC’s direct service mission, the Outreach Program was designed so that every team member could connect Veterans to the breadth of support available through the Commission. Emergency Financial Services (EFS) was a critical component of this effort.

Staff was trained to quickly identify Veterans facing housing instability, utility shutoff, food insecurity, or other immediate crises and to initiate the application process or guide them through our eligibility requirements. This rapid-response model allowed Veterans to receive the help they needed in real time, rather than being redirected through multiple offices or delayed by bureaucratic hurdles.

Of course, no single agency can meet every possible need a Veteran may have. Whether it be mental health treatment, substance use counseling, service animals, home repair, car repair, financial coaching, or specialized care. For these circumstances, the VACCC relied on a robust network of partners across Cook County.

Through long-standing relationships with nonprofits, government agencies, Veteran Service Organizations, and community-based service providers, the VACCC staff were equipped to make warm handoffs that connected Veterans quickly and efficiently to the right resource. These referrals were not passive suggestions; they were coordinated transitions supported by active follow-up and communication whenever necessary.

This comprehensive Inreach model was further strengthened by intentional efforts to streamline the VACCC's internal systems. Over the past year, the Commission began automating key processes, standardizing triage pathways, and developing unified digital intake tools. These improvements enabled staff to gather necessary information more efficiently, track referrals more accurately, and deliver services more consistently across all outreach sites. This resulted in a service model that was both personal and systematized, ensuring Veterans received individualized attention while benefiting from a streamlined operational structure.

Through this approach, the VACCC staff served as navigators, advocates, and connectors. Their interactions did not end when the event closed or the office hours concluded; instead, each engagement became the beginning of an ongoing support relationship. Staff members followed up with Veterans, coordinated with partners, and remained available to guide them through future challenges.

This continuity of care helped build trust and created a strong, sustained foundation for long-term stability. Inreach was not simply an outreach strategy, it was and remains a commitment to meeting Veterans' needs with urgency, empathy, and a coordinated network of support. It reflects the VACCC's belief that every Veteran deserves not just information, but action; not just awareness, but access; and not just a pathway, but a partner walking alongside them.

Strengthening the Digital Gateway: Expanding Access Beyond Physical Boundaries

As society became increasingly interconnected through digital platforms, Veterans were turning to online spaces as their primary means of accessing public services. Post 9-11 Veterans, working families, caregivers, and individuals facing mobility limitations often rely on their phones or computers to gather information, seek support, or verify the legitimacy of government programs. For many, a website or social media post is not just a supplement to in-person outreach, it is their first point of contact and, in some cases, the only avenue through which they feel comfortable reaching out for help.

Understanding this shift, the VACCC intentionally expanded and modernized its digital communication strategy. The goal was to ensure that Veterans could access reliable, accurate information whenever they needed it, without being limited by office hours, transportation constraints, or personal circumstances. Digital engagement became an essential extension of the Commission's commitment to accessibility and equity.

The VACCC maintained a consistent and active presence across multiple social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn, allowing the office to share timely updates, promote upcoming office hours and outreach events, highlight critical services, and recognize the accomplishments of both Veterans and partner organizations.

This sustained digital engagement helped build trust, increased program visibility, and established the VACCC as a familiar and reliable resource within the online spaces many Veterans navigate daily. Importantly, initiatives such as these have become critical force multipliers, enabling the VACCC to extend its reach far beyond what would otherwise be possible with a small staff size.

By leveraging digital tools, the Commission disseminated accurate information quickly, reduce barriers to access, and connected Veterans to services without requiring direct, in-

person staff involvement for every interaction. This approach allowed staff time and expertise to remain focused on Veterans requiring hands-on assistance while still ensuring broad community awareness.

One of the most effective developments in this category of digitization was the introduction of our QR Code business card, distributed at all outreach events and office hour locations. This simple but powerful tool allowed Veterans to immediately access the VACCC's digital presence, our Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn platforms, along with our website and online request forms, without needing to search or navigate multiple webpages. For many Veterans, especially those who preferred quick mobile access, this became the easiest and most direct way to learn about available programs, request assistance, or follow upcoming events.

These QR-linked pathways complemented the VACCC's broader digital engagement strategy. Social media remained a central communication channel, providing real-time updates, service announcements, resource spotlights, and event coverage that helped Veterans stay informed. Instead of relying on more formal portals or lengthy navigation, Veterans were guided to the information they needed through platforms they already used daily. This emphasis on digital accessibility played an essential role in widening the Commission's impact. It increased transparency, strengthened trust, and ensured that Veterans, no matter their schedule, mobility, or location, have a reliable way to connect with us.

Connect

with us



VACCC
[HTTPS://HOVQR.TO/858409](https://hovqr.to/858409)

Scan now to follows
us on our social media



https://linktr.ee/Veterans_Assistance_Commission

VETERANS ASSISTANCE COMMISSION COOK COUNTY



Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center

1100 S. Hamilton Ave, C-011
(LL)Chicago, IL 60612

(312) 433-6010
VACCC@cookcountyl.gov



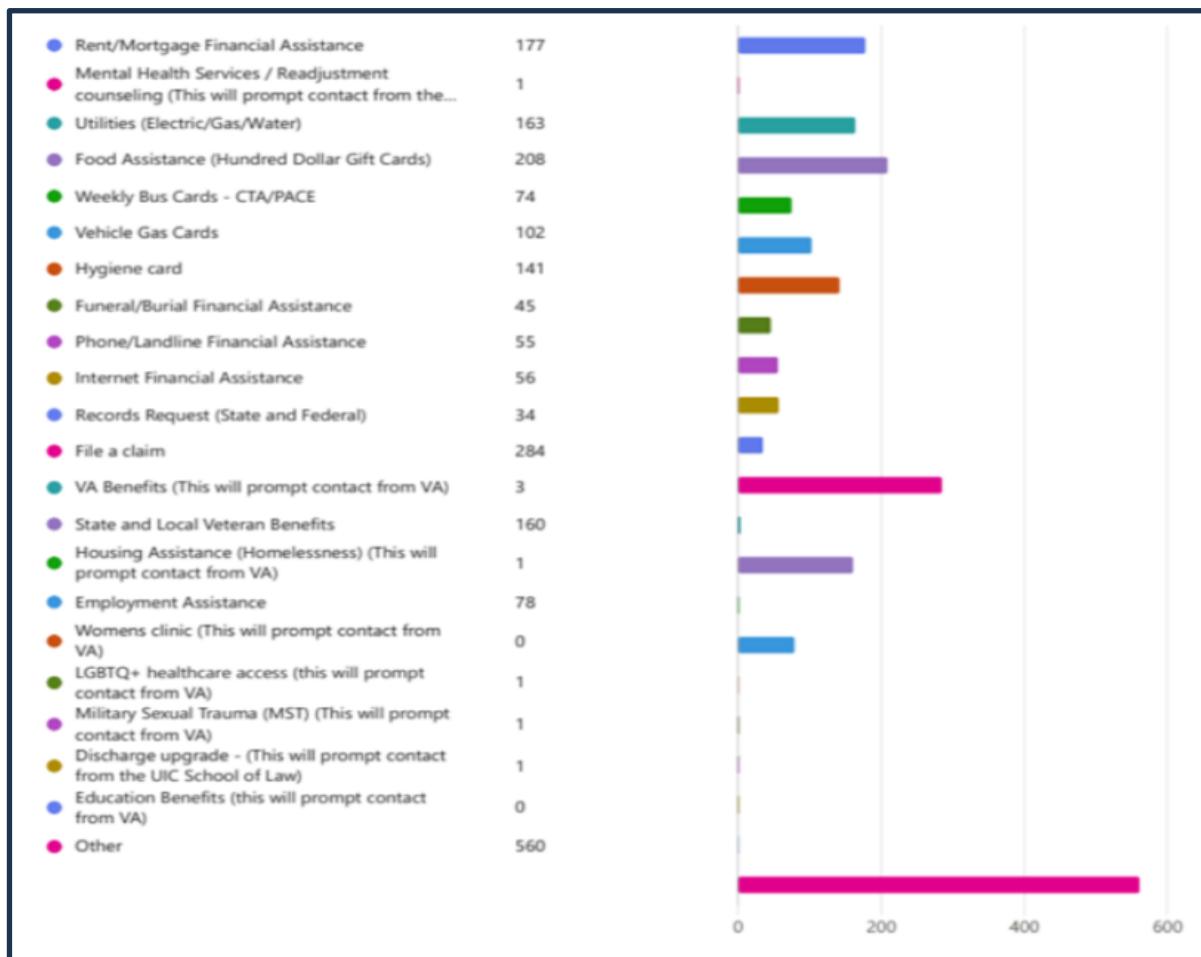
To speak to a
representative and
learn more about our
services, please scan
QR code or visit

<https://hovqr.to/d/e421623>

Interested in following us on social media, viewing our website, or requesting our services? Scan the QR Codes above!

Throughout FY25, we also tracked the usage of our intake form through similar processes. The following chart illustrates the distribution of service requests and assistance types captured through the VACCC's intake and outreach tracking systems we created.

The data reflects the wide range of needs presented by Veterans across Cook County, with the highest volumes associated with claims assistance, food support, housing-related financial assistance, utility assistance, and state and local Veteran benefits.



Breakdown of Intake Form data for FY25 Outreach Team

Several service categories reflected in this data, such as the LGBTQ+ healthcare access, discharge upgrade assistance, and education benefits were incorporated into an automated referral and follow-up workflow. Under this model, when a Veteran submitted a request through the intake system, they automatically received a confirmation email informing them that the appropriate point(s) of contact, either within the VA or with designated partner organizations, have been notified of their need.

These partners were then positioned to follow up directly with the Veteran, typically within 24 to 48 hours. This automation was implemented during Q4, alongside an internal intake system mirroring this for our staff to input data manually; it is already generating measurable engagement and improving our reporting processes, demonstrating the effectiveness of streamlined, technology-enabled service navigation.

Before this system, our staff had to track Veterans they assisted in the field, by manually inputting their information into the intake system, or, by counting the number of Veterans who stopped by our table at the end of an event. Now, after our intake system was modified with an internal system for staff and an external system for Veterans to use, we were able to clearly see how our team was assisting Veterans through direct outreach and our marketing materials.

By reducing the need for immediate manual intervention in select service areas, this approach allowed the VACCC staff to prioritize Veterans requiring direct, on-site assistance while still ensuring timely response and accountability for specialized requests.

A significant portion of entries categorized as “Other” further highlighted the complexity and individuality of Veteran needs, many of which did not fit neatly into predefined service categories. This reinforced the importance of maintaining flexible, staff-guided service navigation capable of adapting to unique circumstances. Lower-volume categories such as specialized healthcare referrals, Military Sexual Trauma (MST) support, discharge upgrades, and VA-specific prompts represented highly targeted interventions that often required coordinated follow-up with federal agencies or external partners rather than immediate on-site resolution.

While these categories appeared smaller in volume, they frequently involved higher levels of coordination, sensitivity, and long-term engagement. Overall, the distribution emphasized both the breadth of services the VACCC engaged with and the critical role staff played in triaging, referring, and directly assisting Veterans across multiple systems. Particularly for high-impact needs related to housing stability, financial security, and access to earned benefits. Together, automation, partnerships, and staff expertise functioned as complementary tools that expanded service capacity while maintaining responsiveness and quality of care.

As the VACCC's outreach efforts continued to expand in the community, the organization has also strengthened the ways Veterans were able to engage with us online. Rather than relying solely on traditional websites or printed materials, the VACCC introduced streamlined, user-friendly tools that helped Veterans connect directly to our social media platforms, intake forms, and essential services with just a single scan. For many, their first interaction with the VACCC began with a shared social media post, a newsletter forwarded by a friend, or a QR code scanned at a community event.

While these tools did not replace the value of in-person service, they significantly amplified the VACCC's reach with our limited staff size. Together with our embedded outreach model, these digital pathways formed a modern, comprehensive strategy that ensured no Veteran in Cook County was left without access to the support they deserve.

A Network of Partnerships: Building a Stronger Veteran Support Ecosystem

Cook County is home to a deep and diverse network of organizations dedicated to serving Veterans, spanning housing assistance, legal aid, mental health treatment, employment training, education programs, crisis support, and federal/state benefit systems. The VACCC Outreach Program stands at the center of this ecosystem, connecting these resources into a coordinated web of support that no single agency could provide alone.

Our partnerships with elected officials, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, Veteran service organizations, community groups, and specialized service providers allowed us to respond to Veterans' needs more swiftly and more comprehensively. These relationships form the backbone of our referral pathways, enabling warm handoffs, rapid coordination, and shared service delivery. Whether a Veteran needed emergency housing, legal representation, counseling, or help navigating benefits, the VACCC tapped into trusted partners who specialized in those areas, ensuring that support arrived from the right source at the right time.

Our role extended beyond referrals. The VACCC also sponsored and supported partner-led programs that expanded access to services directly through our office, such as:



Women Veteran participants from the *Sister Service Bootcamp*

The Sister Service Bootcamp, a targeted fitness and wellness initiative designed specifically for Women Veterans conducted in partnership with community fitness organizations such as ***Magnificent Fitness***. Through this partnership, Magnificent Fitness hosted Free, Women-Veteran-only fitness classes over a month-and-a-half period, with a focus on improving physical health, supporting mental wellness, and creating an inclusive, supportive environment that recognized the unique experiences of Women Veterans.

The program was a major success and was met with overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants. Women Veterans repeatedly expressed their appreciation for both the VACCC team and the instructor, noting the program's positive impact on their overall health, confidence, and sense of community. Several participants even provided video testimonials thanking the team for their dedication and for offering a meaningful program that directly supported their well-being.



YTST Instructor Ryan Harris going through web programs with his Veteran Students

Additionally, ***The Senior Veteran Computer Literacy Program*** was designed to empower Senior Veterans with essential digital skills that helped them stay connected in an increasingly online world. Through a partnership with nonprofit, ***Your Tomorrow Starts Today***, Veterans with professional IT and technical backgrounds volunteered their time to provide hands-on instruction tailored to Senior Veterans. Over several months, participants worked closely with an IT specialist to learn basic computer skills, internet navigation, email setup, and how to create and manage accounts on VA and government websites to better access benefits and services.

Upon completion of the program, each participating Veteran received a Free laptop for personal use, ensuring continued access to the tools needed to practice and apply new skills. In addition, Veterans were provided with one full year of post-program IT support, allowing them to receive ongoing technical assistance as needed – all at no cost. This initiative helped reduce digital barriers, increased independence, and strengthened long-term access to vital resources for Senior Veterans in Cook County.

The **Veteran Monuments Program** was dedicated to honoring the service and sacrifice of Veterans by preserving, restoring, and creating monuments across communities throughout Cook County. Through this initiative, the VACCC collaborated with local partners, including municipalities, Veteran Service Organizations such as Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legion posts, and nonprofit and community-based organizations – to identify monuments in need of repair, restoration, or enhancement, as well as opportunities to establish new memorials.

Working alongside these partners, the VACCC helped coordinate planning, engaged with the Veteran community, and assisted with project execution to ensure Veterans were properly recognized in the places they lived and served. Project plans included monument cleaning and restoration, structural repairs, updated plaques, landscaping improvements, or the development of entirely new memorials that reflected the history and service of local Veterans.

This program strengthened community partnerships while preserving local history, ensuring that the legacy and sacrifices of Veterans across Cook County were respectfully commemorated for generations to come.

These initiatives highlighted the VACCC's commitment not only to connecting Cook County Veterans to services, but also to bringing meaningful programs into the VACCC itself, transforming our office into a hub where community partners could directly engage with Veterans. What made these collaborations effective is that they were not transactional or short-term. They were and remain intentional, long-standing relationships built on shared goals, mutual respect, and community trust.

Partners relied and continue to rely on the VACCC as a stable organizer and connector. Alternatively, we relied on them for their expertise, capacity, and user-focused programs.

Together, we formed a safety net that no Veteran should ever fall through. In a county as large and diverse as Cook, this networked approach was essential. No single agency can meet every need, but a coordinated ecosystem, anchored by the VACCC, ensured that every Cook County Veterans had access to the full spectrum of support available. By strengthening these partnerships and elevating collaborative programs, the VACCC continued to build a community where Veterans were not only served – they were honored, uplifted, and connected to a wider network of opportunity and support.

Program Outcomes & Impact

This past fiscal year demonstrated the measurable impact of a reimagined Outreach Program, one rooted in accessibility, intentional community presence, and stronger interagency collaboration. While the Outreach Program continued to evolve throughout FY25, the data clearly illustrates both the short-term effects of a major programmatic transition and the sustained gains that followed. The table below provides a quarterly and annual snapshot of the VACCC's Outreach Program activity for FY25, capturing three key performance indicators: events attended, Veterans interacted with, and Cook County Veterans provided direct assistance. Together, these metrics illustrate both the scale of the VACCC's community presence and the depth of staff engagement with Veterans across Cook County.

Description	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	FY25
Events Attended	35	37	61	67	200
Veterans Interacted With	1,135	270	809	1,035	3249
Veterans Provided direct Assistance	N/A*	69	279	193	541

*Q2 is when we implemented the new online intake system to track Veterans directly assisted by our Outreach Team.

Program Transition and Q2 Realignment

In Q2, the VACCC undertook a comprehensive overhaul of its Outreach Program to shift away from traditional, stand-alone outreach events and toward two structured, service-driven initiatives: **VetConnect** and **VetTalk**. **VetConnect** is a community-based outreach initiative where the VACCC partnered with elected officials to provide consistent, recurring access to services within their districts, wards, or municipalities. By returning to the same locations on a regular basis, VetConnect built familiarity and trust, making it easier for Veterans and their families to access assistance close to home, ask questions, and connect with resources without navigating unfamiliar systems.

VetTalk is a targeted educational and claims-focused outreach program where VACCC Veterans Service Officers attended individual events or a series of planned engagements throughout the year. During these sessions, VSO's provide clear briefings on VA benefits and the claims process, answering questions, and often assisting Veterans with initiating or advancing claims on the spot, ensuring timely, accurate guidance in a community setting.

This transition in Q2 required a temporary reduction in standard outreach activity as staff reallocated time and resources toward program development, partner onboarding, and the rollout of new tracking systems. Most notably a revamped intake process designed to more accurately capture direct service delivery. As a result, Q2 reflects a temporary dip in attendance and engagement metrics, with 37 events attended and 270 Veterans interacted with Q1's higher interaction count.

Importantly, this decline does not indicate reduced demand or effectiveness; rather, it reflects an intentional restructuring period. Full operational transition into the new model did not occur until the later months of the quarter, limiting the immediate visibility of outcomes in Q2 data.

Stabilization and Growth in Q3 and Q4

Q3 and Q4 represented the first full quarters in which the restructured Outreach Program was operating at scale. During this period, the VACCC conducted 61 events in Q3 and 67 events in Q4, interacting with 809 and 1,035 Veterans respectively. These quarters established a new baseline for what a standard rollout now looks like, one that integrates traditional resource events alongside VetConnect office hours and VetTalk programming.

Notably, Q3 and Q4 also reflect the first meaningful capture of Cook County Veterans provided direct assistance, with 279 Veterans assisted in Q3 and 193 in Q4. These figures highlight the shift from broad, informational outreach toward intentional, staff-led service engagement, where Veterans received hands-on assistance with claims, benefits, emergency financial services, and referrals. By the end of FY25, the VACCC Outreach Team had attended 200 outreach events, interacted with 3,249 Veterans, and provided assistance directly to 541 Veterans – the highest documented level of outreach activity and engagement to date. The past quarter reflects record-breaking levels of outreach volume and Veteran interaction, emphasizing the effectiveness of the new program model.

Improved Data Integrity and Forward-Looking Enhancements

It is important to note that prior to Q2, the VACCC relied on ad hoc intake processes to estimate the number of Cook County Veterans receiving direct assistance. While these methods provided partial insight, they did not consistently distinguish between Veterans assisted on-site by staff and those engaging through outward-facing channels such as social media, QR codes, or informational referrals.

As the Outreach Program continues into FY26, the VACCC is reconfiguring its intake and tracking systems to more precisely reflect who is assisting whom, where assistance occurs, and the depth of staff involvement.

This refinement will allow for clearer differentiation between:

- Cook County Veterans receiving direct, on-site staff assistance
- Veterans engaging through digital tools or self-directed resources
- Veterans supported through partner-led referrals

These improvements will strengthen accountability, enhance performance measurement, and ensure future reporting more accurately reflects the true scope of staff impact. The past year emphasizes a key truth: when services are brought closer to Veterans and delivered through intentional, data-driven programs, outcomes improve. While FY25 included a necessary transition period, the resulting growth in outreach capacity, service quality, and measurable impact demonstrates that the VACCC's Outreach Program is stronger, more targeted, and better equipped to serve Veterans moving forward.

Capacity, Scope, and Team-Driven Systems Development

It is important to emphasize that the programs, outreach systems, digital infrastructure, and operational processes outlined throughout this report were designed, implemented, and maintained by a two-person team within the VACCC. This work has been led by the **Communications and Outreach Manager, Conner Intress**, alongside the **Communications and Outreach Coordinator, Julian Calderon**. Despite limited staffing capacity, this team successfully developed and scaled countywide outreach initiatives, community partnerships, intake and tracking systems, digital communications, and program coordination frameworks that supported Veterans across Cook County.

The scope and reach of this work reflect a deliberate, strategic, and resource-conscious approach, carried out with significant effort, care, and attention to Veteran needs. The breadth of systems and programs described herein should be understood within the context of this staffing reality, highlighting both the efficiency of current operations and the limitations imposed by constrained human resources.

Challenges, Needs, and Systemic Gaps

The VACCC remains deeply committed to ensuring that every Veteran who engages with the Commission receives comprehensive support tailored to their individual needs. Staff work diligently to connect Veterans to all available services that may address the challenges they bring forward. However, this mission is carried out within the reality of finite resources. The VACCC serves an estimated 141,000 Veterans across Cook County, the largest county in the State of Illinois and second largest in the United States.

With a limited staff size, the Commission must balance increasing demand with available capacity. Despite these constraints, the VACCC continues to expand thoughtfully and strategically, investing in improved systems, refined processes, and new service models to maximize impact with the resources currently available. While the Commission has made significant progress in expanding outreach and strengthening visibility, several ongoing challenges continue to shape the environment in which Veteran services are delivered.

A primary challenge is the scale and geographic complexity of Cook County. Its size, population density, and wide-ranging demographic and socioeconomic conditions create logistical hurdles. Certain areas remain underserved due to staffing limitations, transportation barriers, limited community infrastructure, or gaps in partner availability. Even with rotating community-based office hours and embedded service sites, it is not feasible, given current staffing capacity, to reach every community with the same frequency, resulting in uneven access across regions. Awareness also remains a persistent challenge at the local, state, and national levels.

Many Veterans remain unaware of the VACCC's existence or have misconceptions about the scope of services the Commission provides. Outdated information, fragmented communication channels, and competing service systems often lead Veterans to seek assistance elsewhere before eventually reaching the VACCC – if at all.

Addressing this requires sustained investment in digital outreach, targeted communications, and consistent community presence, all of which must be balanced against staffing and operational demands. The complexity of the Veteran benefits and service landscape presents another significant barrier. Veterans are often required to navigate a patchwork of federal, state, and local programs, each with distinct eligibility criteria, documentation requirements, and timelines. Without guidance, many find the process overwhelming and disengage before receiving assistance. The VACCC staff play a critical role in helping Veterans navigate these systems, but high caseloads and the complexity of individual situations limit the amount of time that can be devoted to each case.

Partnership capacity and system-wide constraints also affect outcomes. While the VACCC collaborates effectively with many partners, some organizations face staffing shortages, funding instability, or limited-service availability. Critical services such as long-term housing solutions, mental health treatment, and legal assistance often experience extended waitlists or capacity gaps. These external limitations can delay outcomes for Veterans even when the VACCC acts quickly and effectively.

Finally, data infrastructure remains an evolving need. While current tracking and intake systems provide valuable insight into outreach activity and service delivery, they do not yet fully capture the complexity of Veteran needs or long-term outcomes. Continued investment in data refinement and analysis is essential to identify service gaps, measure impact, and guide strategic resource allocation. Acknowledging these challenges is not a reflection of program failure, but rather a recognition of the realities faced by both Veterans and service providers. By identifying these constraints, the VACCC is better positioned to refine its outreach strategy, strengthen partnerships, and advocate for the resources necessary to deliver equitable, effective services to Veterans throughout Cook County.

Strategic Goals for the Next Fiscal Year

Building on the progress of the past year, the VACCC has identified several strategic priorities designed to strengthen our outreach efforts, expand service accessibility, and improve overall outcomes for Veterans. These goals reflect both immediate needs and long-term ambitions aligned with our mission. A key priority is the expansion and formalization of community-embedded service sites. The VACCC aims to increase the number of locations offering rotating office hours and improve consistency in scheduling across districts and municipalities. This effort includes deepening partnerships with elected officials, libraries, nonprofit organizations, and Veteran Service Organizations to create a predictable, countywide network of service access points. The objective is simple: ensure that every Veteran, regardless of location, has a reliable place to receive assistance.

Another central goal is the enhancement of the VACCC's digital infrastructure. In coordination with the Cook County Bureau of Technology (BOT), VACCC is integrating its website link across County systems to improve visibility and ensure Veterans can easily access accurate service information. Concurrently, the website is being redeveloped into a fully accessible digital portal that streamlines applications, referrals, and resource navigation for Veterans and their families across Cook County. Strengthening digital tools will allow Veterans to initiate claims, request financial, find nearby office hours, or access resource directories without waiting for traditional business hours or in-person events.

Improving digital engagement also supports better data collection, allowing the VACCC to identify trends, allocate resources effectively, and make evidence-based decisions. Staffing optimization and internal capacity-building are also critical goals. While the VACCC's workload continues to grow, staffing levels have not grown proportionally. The next fiscal year will focus on maximizing existing staff capacity through improved workflow systems, targeted training, and clearer delineation between outreach and administrative responsibilities. Additionally, the VACCC will explore opportunities to

leverage volunteers, partner personnel, and cross-agency collaboration to expand coverage without overtaxing staff.

Strengthening partnerships remains an essential objective. The VACCC will continue to work closely with governmental and nonprofit partners to build a more coordinated service ecosystem. Formalizing and automating referral pathways, developing shared training opportunities, and participating in joint initiatives will enhance collective impact and reduce duplication across agencies.

Finally, the VACCC aims to elevate its role as an advocate for systemic change. Through close engagement with county leadership, state agencies, and federal partners, the VACCC will identify policy barriers that impede Veteran access and champion reforms that improve efficiency, transparency, and equity across the service landscape. These goals represent more than administrative improvements – they reflect a commitment to building a modern, responsive, and accessible service system for Veterans across Cook County.

As the Commission moves into the next fiscal year, these priorities will guide our efforts, inform operational planning, and strengthen our shared mission of ensuring every Veteran receives the support they deserve.

VIII. VSO

Veterans Service Officer (VSO) Operations & Impact

The Veterans Service Officers (VSOs) of the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County (VACCC) form the operational backbone of the agency's service delivery system. As we continue to build a modern, countywide Veterans services infrastructure, the VSO team has established professional standards, trauma-informed practices, and data-driven workflows that ensure Veterans, caregivers, and survivors receive accurate, timely, and compassionate support.

VSO Role & Scope of Work

The role and scope of work for the VACCC VSO's covers the full continuum of benefits assistance and community engagement. VSOs prepare and file initial claims, supplemental claims, and appeals while conducting comprehensive intake assessments to identify state, federal, and county benefits that may support each Veteran and their family. Their work includes providing trauma-informed guidance for Military Sexual Trauma, (MST), post-traumatic stress disorder, (PTSD), and other sensitive claims, as well as coordinating directly with VHA for healthcare enrollment, MST services, and toxic exposure evaluations.

In FY25 VSOs represented the VACCC at outreach events and community engagements, ensuring trusted access points throughout Cook County. All work was carried out in compliance with Title 38 of Illinois, the Military and Veterans Assistance Act, NACVSO accreditation standards, and VACCC Standard Operating Procedures, creating a consistent, accountable framework for high-quality service delivery.

Establishing Accredited Services in Cook County

VSO claims activity during Fiscal Year 2025 reflects both a period of organizational transition and the successful establishment of sustained operational capacity.

From December 2024 through June 2025, recorded claims activity was limited and intermittent, corresponding to a phase of staffing changes, leadership onboarding, and accreditation development rather than a full-service operational environment.

At the start of the fiscal year, one fully trained and accredited VSO, Victor Somoza, was on staff and provided direct claims assistance. Mr. Somoza remained employed through May 2025, during which time claims activity occurred on a limited and case-specific basis without the support of a fully built intake.

In late March 2025, VSO Manager, Derek Giffin was hired to assume leadership responsibilities. While Mr. Giffin was actively engaged in organizational development and operational planning upon hire, he did not obtain VSO accreditation until July 2025, at which point he successfully completed NACVSO accreditation, obtained his Personal Identity Verification (PIV) card, and secured full VA system credentials, restoring Cook County's ability to deliver accredited VA claims directly to Veterans for the first time in several years. This milestone marked the formal launch of VACCC's claims program and immediately expanded the county's capacity to assist Veterans across the entire benefits lifecycle.

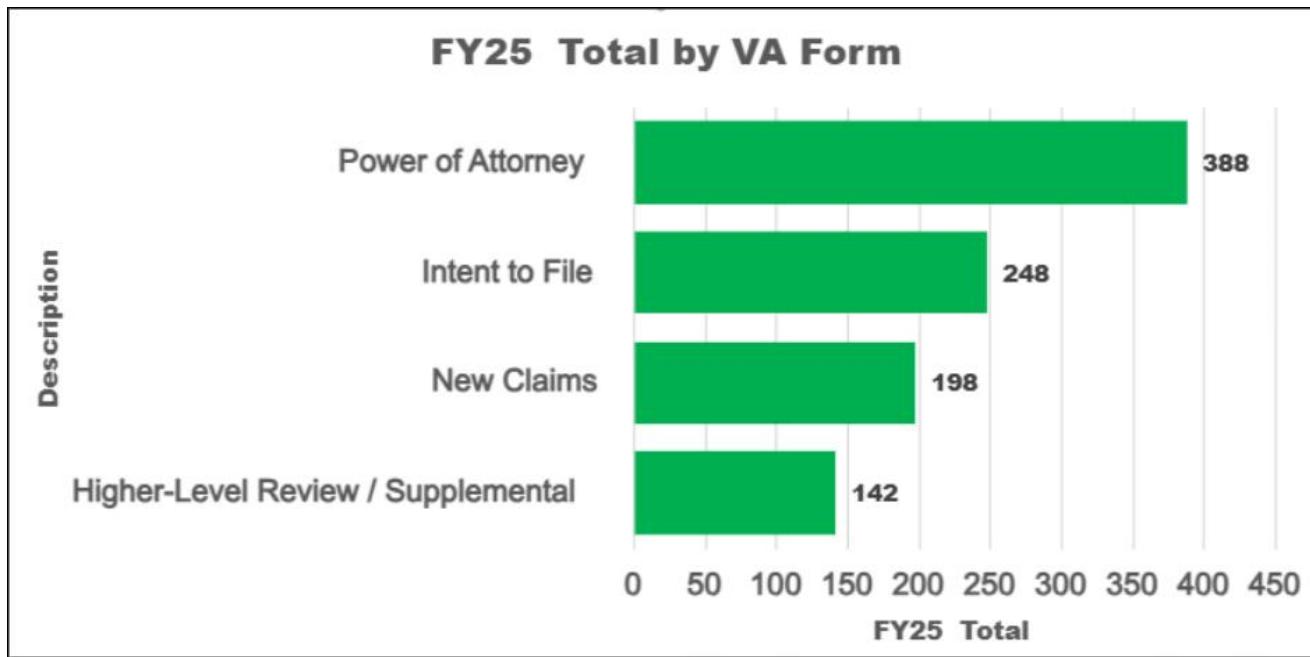
In July 2025, VSO Manager, Justyna Berry was hired and began the accreditation process while simultaneously supporting claims operations and leading the development of a localized county VSO training program designed to standardize service delivery and support future staff onboarding.

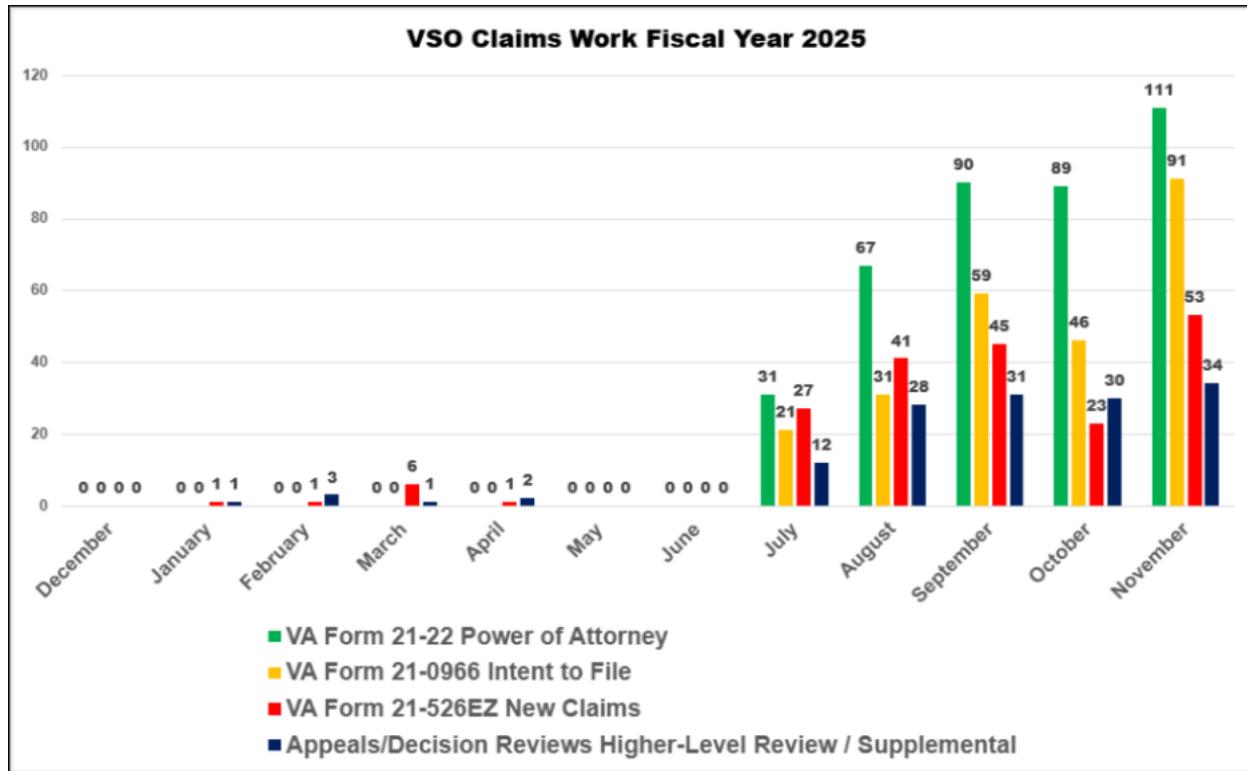
In November 2025, VSO, Faris Karadsheh was hired and began the accreditation process while supporting claims intake operations and providing outreach services.

FY25 Claims Production

The table below reflects all accredited claims actions processed in fiscal year 2025 demonstrating both the immediate demand for services in Cook County and the rapid operational ramp-up following the VSO's accreditation.

Monthly VSO Claims Activity - Fiscal Year 2025				
Month	POA (21-22)	Intent to File (21-0966)	New Claims (21-526EZ)	Appeals / Reviews
Dec	0	0	0	0
Jan	0	0	1	1
Feb	0	0	1	3
Mar	0	0	6	1
Apr	0	0	1	2
May	0	0	0	0
Jun	0	0	0	0
Jul	31	21	27	12
Aug	67	31	41	28
Sep	90	59	45	31
Oct	89	46	23	30
Nov	111	91	53	34





From July through November, claims activity increased consistently across all major categories, including Power of Attorney (VA Form 21-22), Intents to File (VA Form 21-0966), New Claims (VA Form 21-526EZ), and Appeals and Decision Reviews. This period marked the first time in the fiscal year that all claim types were processed concurrently under accredited leadership, establishing a reliable and defensible baseline for operational performance.

Claims volume accelerated steadily throughout this period, with November reflecting the highest level of activity across all categories. The growth observed during this timeframe demonstrated both increasing Veteran engagement and the maturation of operational systems, including intake processes, accreditation alignment, and supervisory oversight. The sustained rise in Appeals and Decision Reviews further reflected Veteran confidence in VSO representation for complex and previously adjudicated claims.

Power of Attorney (VA Form 21-22): 388 Completed

POA's surged from 31 in July to 111 in November, a clear indicator of Veterans transitioning to VACCC for representation. This growth reflects restored trust and access for Veterans who had been unrepresented or relying on fragmented support. Each POA represents a Veteran formally choosing VACCC to manage their claim, gather evidence, and advocate on their behalf.

Intent to File (VA Form 21-0966): 248 Completed

Intents to File increased steadily, peaking at 91 in November. These filings created the protective start date for future benefits and indicated a growing pipeline of compensation, pension, and survivor claims that VACCC will continue to develop in FY26.

New Claims (VA Form 21-526EZ): 198 Submitted

The VSO filed nearly 200 new disability claims within the first quarter of accreditation. This early volume, beginning with 27 filings in July, confirmed that the Cook County Veterans were waiting for a reliable, local, accredited representative. These filings directly supported compensation access for Veterans across eras, including Vietnam, Gulf War, Post-9/11, PACT Act, and underserved populations.

Appeals / Decision Reviews: 142 Completed

A strong early showing in Higher-Level Reviews and Supplemental Claims demonstrated advanced technical capability. Veterans seeking corrections to prior denials or errors were immediately able to obtain representation. Steady month-to-month activity shows that many residents previously had unresolved claims and needed expertise to re-engage with the system.

What These Numbers Mean for Cook County

The combined 976 total claims actions in the first months of operation illustrate a simple truth: once Cook County finally had an accredited VSO, Veterans came forward in significant numbers. The VAC is now serving a population that had long lacked direct access to accredited benefits representation despite being the second-largest county in the nation and home to the largest Veteran populations in Illinois.

This early performance set a strong foundation for FY25 and positions the VACCC's VSO program to expand, deepen outreach, and continue closing long-standing gaps in access to earned federal benefits through to FY26.

VSO Presence Across Cook County

The Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County's VSO presence operates through a multi-site, community-focused model designed to maximize access to accredited benefits assistance for Veterans. Full-service operations are available at both the Hamilton Headquarters Chicago (HHC), 1100 S. Hamilton Ave., and the Chicago Regional Office (CRO), 69 W. Washington, Suite 1420, with all financial assistance requests routed through the VAC HHC location for processing.

The Chicago Regional Office also serves as a central hub for special emphasis initiatives, including Military Sexual Trauma (MST) claims, providing a discreet, trauma-informed, and secure environment where survivors can seek assistance with dignity and privacy. The VACCC maintains both a dedicated male and female MST Coordinator to ensure Veterans may choose the type of support with which they feel most comfortable.

In addition to ongoing individual assistance, the Commission has established a structured calendar of MST benefit briefings and claims clinics, with monthly sessions scheduled throughout FY26.

Beyond these primary offices, VSO's delivered services directly within communities through office hours, targeted outreach, and participation in community events, including MST clinics, PACT Act briefings, college outreach sessions, and partnerships with Veteran service organizations such as the VFW, American Legion, and DAV. This countywide service model ensured Veterans accessed accredited support in traditional office settings, trusted community locations, and specialized outreach environments across Cook County.

Forward Strategy FY 2026

For Fiscal Year 2026, the forward strategy centers on the continued expansion of the VSO program through the placement of additional accredited staff across two Cook County quadrants, ensuring consistent geographic coverage and reducing wait times for Veterans seeking assistance. As the VACCC continues to grow, new hires will increase capacity for claims development, outreach, and specialized casework, enabling the organization to meet rising demand while sustaining high-quality, Veteran-centered service delivery.

This expansion is complemented by the deployment of modern digital tools, including online intake, secure document uploads, appointment scheduling, and a VSO locator, all designed to streamline access to services and reduce administrative barriers for Veterans and their families.

In November, the VACCC received Cook County approval to implement VetraSpec as its claims management system and will advance this investment by staffing Administrative Assistants to support VSO's in fully leveraging the platform, improving workflow efficiency, documentation accuracy, and case tracking. The Commission will also continue to deepen expertise in critical focus areas such as toxic exposure, post-traumatic stress disorder, military sexual trauma, aging Veteran needs, and complex appeals, strengthening

Cook County's capacity to deliver precise, trauma-informed support. Progress in FY26 will be reinforced through strengthened partnerships with the Veterans Benefits Administration, Veterans Health Administration, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs, local colleges, municipalities, and townships, creating a coordinated countywide network that meets Veterans where they are and supports them throughout the benefits process.

IX. FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

This FY25 financial overview highlights the year-over-year financial assistance provided to our Cook County Veterans in various categories compared to FY24. The total assistance provided in FY25 shows significant shifts across essential service areas, reflecting a continued commitment to supporting Veterans and their families facing increased economic pressures and emerging needs.

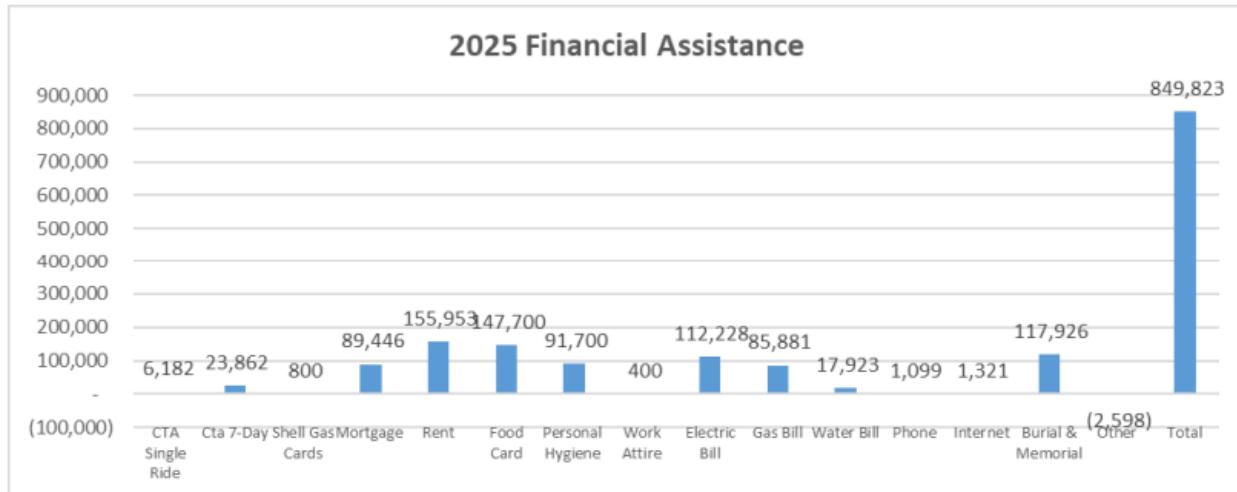
- **Overall Financial Assistance increased** by 30%, rising from \$652,153.89 to \$849,822.95.
- **Food and Personal Hygiene Assistance** saw major increases (Food +53%; Hygiene +66%), indicating heightened demand for essential living support.
- **Transportation support shifted:** CTA Single Ride Cards increased by 38%, while CTA 7-Day Cards decreased by 9%.
- **Utility Assistance rose** across all major categories: Electric (+32%), Gas (+12%), Water (+21%).
- **Burial & Memorial Assistance** nearly tripled (+197%), ensuring dignified support for Veteran families.
- **Total Veterans Served increased** by 19%, from 2,886 in 2024 to 3,428 in 2025, reflecting expanded outreach and higher demand.

- **Male Veterans Served increased** by 18%, from 2,498 in 2024 to 2,959 in FY25, reflecting expanded outreach and higher demand.
- **Female Veterans Served increased** by 23%, from 382 to 469, demonstrating strengthened efforts to support Women Veterans.

The financial and demographic increases observed in FY25 reflect a growing reliance on VACCC programs. Rising costs of living, housing instability, and transportation needs contributed to greater utilization of assistance services. These trends demonstrate the Commission's ongoing commitment to meeting Veterans where they are and ensuring equitable access to critical supports that enhance stability, well-being, and quality of life.

Financial Disbursements

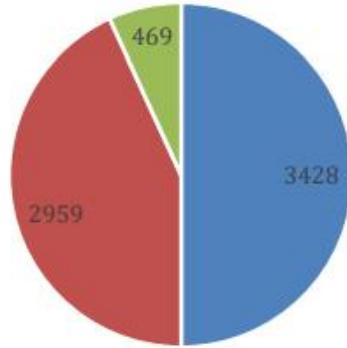
Description	2024 (\$)	2025 (\$)	% Change
CTA Single Ride Card	4,466.00	6,182.00	38%
Cta 7-Day Card	26,219.50	23,862.00	-9%
Shell Gas Cards		800.00	
Mortgage Assistance	84,998.58	89,446.23	5%
Rent Assistance	167,655.89	155,952.78	-7%
Food Card	96,600.00	147,700.00	53%
Personal Hygiene Card	55,100.00	91,700.00	66%
Work Attire	500.00	400.00	-20%
Electric Bill	85,333.85	112,228.18	32%
Gas Bill	76,835.15	85,880.67	12%
Water Bill	14,773.95	17,922.97	21%
Phone	-	1,099.12	
Internet	-	1,320.70	
Burial & Memorial	39,670.97	117,925.90	197%
Other	-	(2,597.60)	
Total Veteran Disbursements	652,153.89	849,822.95	30%



Demographic Data

Description	2024	2025	% Change
Total Veterans Served	2886	3428	19%
Male Veterans Served	2498	2959	18%
Female Veterans Served	382	469	23%
Other Veterans Served	6		

Veterans by Gender



■ Total Veterans Served ■ Male Veterans Served ■ Female Veterans Served

The increase in assistance for Cook County Veterans in FY25 compared to FY24 reflects a comprehensive effort to enhance support across various essential services. Notably, the addition of new utility assistance programs, such as support for phone and internet services, as well as increased aid for Female Veterans, highlights a more holistic approach to addressing the diverse needs of the Cook County Veteran population.

X. FINANCIAL REPORTS

PERSONNEL SERVICES	DECEMBER 2024	JANUARY 2025	FEBRUARY 2025	MARCH 2025	APRIL 2025	MAY 2025	JUNE 2025
501010-Sal-Wag of Reg Employees	\$ 19,822.19	\$ 56,201.39	\$ 39,805.33	\$ 39,590.60	\$ 55,607.85	\$ 57,507.49	\$ 65,387.40
501030-Salary/Turnover Adjustment	\$ -		\$ 8,597.70			\$ -	\$ -
501511-Mandatory Medicare Cost	\$ 279.23	\$ 830.26	\$ 684.95	\$ 558.62	\$ 785.37	\$ 811.99	\$ 926.14
501590-Group Life Insurance	\$ 31.41	\$ 31.41	\$ 31.41	\$ 31.41	\$ 31.41	\$ 31.41	\$ 31.41
501610-Group Health Insurance	\$ 1,320.31	\$ 1,320.31	\$ 1,320.31	\$ 1,320.31	\$ 1,320.31	\$ 1,320.31	\$ 1,320.31
501640-Group Dental Insurance	\$ 111.74	\$ 111.74	\$ 111.74	\$ 111.74	\$ 111.74	\$ 111.74	\$ 111.74
501660-Unemployment Compensation	\$ 10.50	\$ 10.50	\$ 10.50	\$ 10.50	\$ 10.50	\$ 10.50	\$ 10.50
501690-Vision Care	\$ 19.51	\$ 19.51	\$ 19.51	\$ 19.51	\$ 19.51	\$ 19.51	\$ 19.51
501715-Group Pharmacy Insurance	\$ 565.78	\$ 565.78	\$ 565.78	\$ 565.78	\$ 565.78	\$ 565.78	\$ 565.78
SUBTOTAL: PERSONNEL SERVICES	\$ 22,160.67	\$ 59,090.90	\$ 51,147.23	\$ 42,208.47	\$ 58,452.47	\$ 60,378.73	\$ 68,372.79
SPECIAL PROGRAMS	DECEMBER 2024	JANUARY 2025	FEBRUARY 2025	MARCH 2025	APRIL 2025	MAY 2025	JUNE 2025
521313 - Special or Coop Programs (Veteran Disbursements)	\$ 50,858.95	\$ 38,364.11	\$ 39,718.77	\$ 50,430.63	\$ 66,863.73	\$ 49,890.19	\$ 49,207.16
SUBTOTAL: SPECIAL PROGRAMS	\$ 50,858.95	\$ 38,364.11	\$ 39,718.77	\$ 50,430.63	\$ 66,863.73	\$ 49,890.19	\$ 49,207.16
OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE	DECEMBER 2024	JANUARY 2025	FEBRUARY 2025	MARCH 2025	APRIL 2025	MAY 2025	JUNE 2025
501790-Prof /Tech Membership Fees		\$ 250.00	\$ 600.00		\$ 550.00		
501805-Training Program Staff			\$ 1,500.00		\$ 3,950.95	\$ 1,500.00	
501836-Transportation and Travel Expenses	\$ 88.90	\$ 748.33	\$ 324.55	\$ 448.00	\$ 274.76	\$ 160.17	\$ 358.12
520150-Communication Services	\$ 4,062.82						
520260-Postage							
520490-External Graphics and Reproduction Services		\$ 713.86	\$ 787.07	\$ 77.50	\$ 288.15	\$ 514.25	\$ 60.00
520830-Professional Services	\$ 5,896.86	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 375.20	\$ 21,574.48	\$ 101,810.10	\$ 53,182.60	\$ 4,650.10
521054-Legal Services	\$ 4,614.00	\$ 6,153.00	\$ 4,798.00	\$ 510.00	\$ 1,639.50	\$ 442.50	
530605-Office Supplies	\$ 2,176.10	\$ 2,215.19	\$ 1,359.13	\$ 4,600.91	\$ 1,221.59	\$ 1,065.60	\$ 2,054.38
540130-Maintenance and Subscription Services	\$ 174.01						
Bank Fees - Amalgamated Bank	\$ 72.40	\$ 66.99	\$ 37.46	\$ 130.77	\$ 102.34	\$ 104.78	\$ 131.75
Other		\$ 738.41					\$ 310.46
SUBTOTAL: OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE	\$ 17,085.09	\$ 40,885.78	\$ 9,781.41	\$ 27,341.66	\$ 109,837.39	\$ 56,969.90	\$ 7,564.81
TOTAL	\$ 90,104.71	\$ 138,340.79	\$ 100,647.41	\$ 119,980.76	\$ 235,153.59	\$ 167,238.82	\$ 125,144.76
AGENCY STATISTICS FY2025	DECEMBER 2024	JANUARY 2025	FEBRUARY 2025	MARCH 2025	APRIL 2025	MAY 2025	JUNE 2025
Veterans In Office Visits	243	237	220	249	248	250	278
Calls Handled	200	407	365	351	237	293	199
Outreach Events	6	8	11	10	9	16	5
New Veterans	45	39	30	47	54	56	41

NOTE: Personnel and Operations expenditures are subject to change pending year-end processing, modifications and required adjustments. The figures presented reflect data available as of December 1, 2025

PERSONNEL SERVICES	JULY 2025	AUGUST 2025	SEPTEMBER 2025	OCTOBER 2025	NOVEMBER 2025	2025 YTD ACTUAL
501010-Sal-Wag of Reg Employees	\$ 70,021.42	\$ 110,620.25	\$ 76,217.05	\$ 78,622.37	\$ 81,252.79	\$ 750,656.13
501030-Salary/Turnover Adjustment			\$ -			\$ 8,597.70
501511-Mandatory Medicare Cost	\$ 990.28	\$ 1,558.30	\$ 1,074.75	\$ 1,108.07	\$ 1,146.26	\$ 10,754.22
501590-Group Life Insurance	\$ 31.41	\$ 31.41	\$ 31.41	\$ 31.41	\$ 31.41	\$ 376.92
501610-Group Health Insurance	\$ 1,320.31	\$ 1,320.31	\$ 1,320.31	\$ 1,320.31	\$ 1,320.31	\$ 15,843.72
501640-Group Dental Insurance	\$ 111.74	\$ 111.74	\$ 111.74	\$ 111.74	\$ 111.74	\$ 1,340.88
501660-Unemployment Compensation	\$ 10.50	\$ 10.50	\$ 10.50	\$ 10.50	\$ 10.50	\$ 126.00
501690-Vision Care	\$ 19.51	\$ 19.51	\$ 19.51	\$ 19.51	\$ 19.51	\$ 234.12
501715-Group Pharmacy Insurance	\$ 565.78	\$ 565.78	\$ 565.78	\$ 565.78	\$ 565.78	\$ 6,789.36
SUBTOTAL: PERSONNEL SERVICES	\$ 73,070.95	\$ 114,237.80	\$ 79,351.05	\$ 81,789.69	\$ 84,458.30	\$ 794,719.05
SPECIAL PROGRAMS	JULY 2025	AUGUST 2025	SEPTEMBER 2025	OCTOBER 2025	NOVEMBER 2025	2025 YTD ACTUAL
521313 - Special or Coop Programs (Veteran Disbursements)	\$ 78,377.22	\$ 93,844.32	\$ 98,600.85	\$ 111,759.28	\$ 121,907.74	\$ 849,822.95
SUBTOTAL: SPECIAL PROGRAMS	\$ 78,377.22	\$ 93,844.32	\$ 98,600.85	\$ 111,759.28	\$ 121,907.74	\$ 849,822.95
OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE	JULY 2025	AUGUST 2025	SEPTEMBER 2025	OCTOBER 2025	NOVEMBER 2025	2025 YTD ACTUAL
501790-Prof /Tech Membership Fees		\$ 65.00		\$ 50.00		\$ 1,515.00
501805-Training Program Staff	\$ 4,300.00	\$ 2,038.00	\$ 15,200.00	\$ 400.00		\$ 28,888.95
501836-Transportation and Travel Expenses	\$ 188.53	\$ 3,751.05	\$ 341.15	\$ 634.36	\$ 139.80	\$ 7,457.72
520150-Communication Services						\$ 4,062.82
520260-Postage	\$ 365.00	\$ (53.00)		\$ 312.00		\$ 624.00
520490-External Graphics and Reproduction Services		\$ 2,457.56	\$ 157.50	\$ 804.90		\$ 5,860.79
520830-Professional Services	\$ 102,160.00	\$ 68,765.00	\$ 63,685.55	\$ 62,439.40	\$ 51,903.12	\$ 566,442.41
521054-Legal Services	\$ 7,922.20	\$ 4,979.40		\$ 2,077.20	\$ 930.00	\$ 34,065.80
530605-Office Supplies	\$ 11,833.81	\$ 3,219.68	\$ 2,237.65	\$ 2,784.00	\$ 3,589.15	\$ 38,357.19
540130-Maintenance and Subscription Services	\$ 420.00					\$ 594.01
Bank Fees - Amalgamated Bank	\$ 72.03	\$ 195.47	\$ 102.58	\$ 102.06	\$ 165.18	\$ 1,283.81
Other			\$ 312.46			\$ 1,361.33
SUBTOTAL: OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE	\$ 127,261.57	\$ 85,418.16	\$ 82,036.89	\$ 69,603.92	\$ 56,727.25	\$ 690,513.83
TOTAL	\$ 278,709.74	\$ 293,500.28	\$ 259,988.79	\$ 263,152.89	\$ 263,093.29	\$ 2,335,055.83
AGENCY STATISTICS FY2025	JULY 2025	AUGUST 2025	SEPTEMBER 2025	OCTOBER 2025	NOVEMBER 2025	TOTAL
Veterans In Office Visits	327	385	396	339	256	3,428
Calls Handled	624	416	501	688	382	4,663
Outreach Events	23	33	27	4	36	188
New Veterans	81	83	86	54	41	657

NOTE: Personnel and Operations expenditures are subject to change pending year-end processing, modifications and required adjustments. The figures presented reflect data available as of December 1, 2025

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE DISBURSEMENTS

FY 2025	CTA SINGLE RIDE			CTA 7-DAY			MORTGAGE		RENT		ELECTRIC		PEOPLES / NICOR GAS		WATER	
	Date	VETS	CARDS	TOTAL	VETS	CARDS	TOTAL	VETS	TOTAL	VETS	TOTAL	VETS	TOTAL	VETS	TOTAL	VETS
December	13	62	341.00	118	118	2,419.00	3	4,200.00	11	14,936.50	16	6,200.94	9	2,125.65	4	1,735.86
January	36	166	913.00	72	72	1,476.00	3	4,200.00	5	6,313.75	14	5,761.57	11	3,678.23	4	1,021.56
February	17	79	434.50	85	86	1,763.00	2	2,800.00	5	5,667.00	19	8,082.23	13	5,741.79	4	1,830.25
March	16	79	434.50	95	95	1,947.50	3	4,200.00	7	6,967.10	21	10,241.26	19	8,874.78	4	1,465.49
April	19	87	478.50	92	92	1,886.00	8	10,185.69	11	14,293.00	22	8,561.97	24	10,189.50	6	1,569.07
May	9	42	231.00	105	105	2,152.50	2	2,800.00	10	13,461.38	20	9,151.35	17	8,276.98	3	1,099.41
June	16	80	440.00	103	103	2,111.50	6	8,020.80	2	2,100.00	25	8,154.38	19	8,196.57	4	1,883.91
July	18	90	495.00	107	107	2,193.50	5	8,800.00	10	14,675.00	34	11,751.15	17	7,228.64	2	453.53
August	18	79	434.50	100	100	2,050.00	7	12,883.50	9	13,314.95	33	12,542.22	25	10,357.40	5	1,486.11
September	20	98	539.00	112	112	2,296.00	5	8,520.55	12	19,044.10	28	10,608.57	23	8,854.19	4	1,131.75
October	32	152	836.00	98	98	2,009.00	9	15,447.21	15	22,982.00	33	12,719.46	23	7,886.86	9	2,977.13
November	22	110	605.00	76	76	1,558.00	4	7,388.48	13	22,198.00	23	8,453.08	14	4,470.08	4	1,268.90
Total	236	1124	6,182.00	1163	1164	23,862.00	57	89,446.23	110	155,952.78	288	112,228.18	214	85,880.67	53	17,922.97

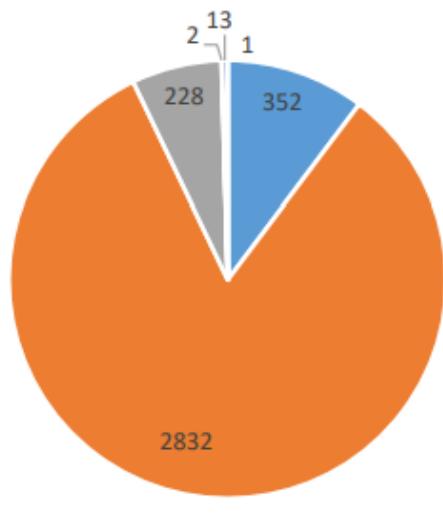
FY 2025	ALDI-FOOD CARDS			WORK ATTIRE		PERSONAL HYGIENE			GAS CARDS		INTERNET		TELEPHONE		BURIAL & MEMORIAL		ADJ	Total	
	Date	VETS	CARDS	TOTAL	VETS	TOTAL	VETS	CARDS	TOTAL	VETS	CARDS	TOTAL	VETS	TOTAL	VETS	TOTAL			
December	53	73	7,400.00	0	-	39	55	5,500.00	0		-				4	6,000.00		50,858.95	
January	41	57	5,700.00	0	-	22	33	3,300.00	0		-				4	6,000.00		38,364.11	
February	54	80	8,000.00	0	-	28	39	3,900.00	0		-				1	1,500.00		39,718.77	
March	71	80	8,000.00	1	100.00	32	37	3,700.00	0		-				3	4,500.00		50,430.63	
April	65	74	7,400.00	0	-	45	49	4,800.00	0		-				5	7,500.00		66,863.73	
May	65	75	7,500.00	0	-	32	36	3,600.00	0		-				2	1,617.57		49,890.19	
June	67	80	8,000.00	0	-	60	71	7,100.00	2	2	200.00				2	3,000.00		49,207.16	
July	90	135	13,500.00	0	-	90	114	11,400.00	2	2	200.00	1	80.40		4	9,000.00	(1,400.00)	78,377.22	
August	82	213	21,300.00	1	100.00	76	117	11,700.00	1	1	100.00	7	626.17	10	949.47	2	6,000.00		93,844.32
September	103	230	23,000.00	1	100.00	118	154	15,400.00	1	1	100.00	2	197.74	0	-	3	8,808.95		98,600.85
October	98	238	23,800.00	1	100.00	108	145	14,500.00	2	2	200.00	2	152.59	2	149.65	3	7,999.38		111,759.28
November	66	141	14,100.00	0	-	61	68	6,800.00	0	0	-	3	263.80	0	-	3	56,000.00	(1,197.60)	121,907.74
Total	855	1476	147,700.00	4	400.00	711	918	91,700.00	8	8	800.00	15	1,320.70	12	1,099.12	36	117,925.90	(2,597.60)	849,822.95

FINANCIAL DISBURSEMENTS BY COUNTY DISTRICT

FY 2025	1st District		2nd District		3rd District		4th District		5th District		6th District		7th District		8th District		9th District		10th District	
	Tara Stamps	VETS	Michael Scott Jr.	VETS	Bill Lowry	VETS	Stanley Moore	VETS	Monica Gordon	VETS	Donna Miller	VETS	Alma E. Anaya	VETS	Jessica Vasquez	VETS	Maggie Trevor	VETS	Bridget Gainer	
DATE	VETS	AMOUNT	VETS	AMOUNT	VETS	AMOUNT	VETS	AMOUNT	VETS	AMOUNT	VETS	AMOUNT	VETS	AMOUNT	VETS	AMOUNT	VETS	AMOUNT	VETS	AMOUNT
December	15	9,858.31	52	7,103.65	48	6,918.32	30	5,420.68	22	8,323.00	7	1,020.50	22	1,007.50	7	82.00	1	-	7	223.00
January	18	4,468.98	55	3,738.00	61	8,114.34	23	5,674.52	11	2,992.23	5	2,883.55	22	460.00	5	1,281.76	1	195.16	5	1,841.00
February	14	3,189.00	58	5,312.28	49	2,791.80	20	7,811.78	26	12,189.82	7	1,192.69	10	1,661.50	4	691.00	1	-	3	120.50
March	19	1,625.69	57	7,576.19	58	9,526.02	26	7,260.63	20	10,001.82	9	2,132.00	15	3,332.00	9	1,073.00	1	997.50	8	348.00
April	18	10,315.78	59	6,726.20	49	15,264.42	25	3,220.02	32	14,702.26	10	2,853.30	15	1,055.16	8	768.57	1	-	3	141.00
May	9	1,592.13	60	9,658.15	65	13,888.38	14	3,176.09	27	4,523.25	7	1,189.16	19	1,293.50	10	4,732.47	0	-	5	1,768.50
June	18	1,099.27	78	9,124.59	75	12,745.13	27	4,193.37	22	7,320.70	10	2,287.15	9	2,152.95	5	289.00	2	241.00	7	420.50
July	11	720.50	69	9,978.46	82	11,945.49	41	12,035.81	33	17,689.67	11	2,959.50	16	1,459.31	16	5,755.97	0	-	9	4,839.00
August	14	4,615.10	85	13,643.34	89	12,917.42	30	8,197.98	41	20,382.15	23	14,381.05	26	4,907.32	13	695.60	1	-	11	504.46
September	19	5,903.40	111	20,813.25	93	30,411.75	40	7,182.92	24	7,711.90	12	2,682.00	17	1,828.88	20	5,830.00	0	-	8	1,927.14
October	12	3,437.00	83	14,182.88	70	21,040.66	35	8,528.42	35	21,238.87	13	11,680.55	10	1,468.88	19	2,119.00	1	2,308.41	10	3,872.50
November	12	8,255.47	64	11,785.39	58	16,120.03	30	12,957.90	32	6,477.91	5	1,370.50	12	1,023.00	10	4,464.66	1	-	6	703.00
Total	179	55,080.63	831	119,642.38	797	161,683.76	341	85,660.12	325	133,553.58	119	46,631.95	193	21,650.00	126	27,783.03	10	3,742.07	82	16,708.60

FY 2025	11th District		12th District		13th District		14th District		15th District		16th District		17th District						Vet Count	
	John P. Daley	VETS	Bridget Degnen	VETS	AMOUNT	Josina Morita	VETS	AMOUNT	Scott R. Britton	VETS	AMOUNT	Kevin B. Morrison	VETS	AMOUNT	Frank J. Aguilar	VETS	AMOUNT	Sean M. Morrison	Adj	Total
DATE	VETS	AMOUNT	VETS	AMOUNT	VETS	AMOUNT	VETS	AMOUNT	VETS	AMOUNT	VETS	AMOUNT	VETS	AMOUNT	VETS	AMOUNT	VETS	AMOUNT	VETS	AMOUNT
December	12	417.32	6	2,457.00	1	120.50	1	1,400.00	0	-	8	2,783.13	4	3,724.04			\$ 50,858.95	243		
January	12	3,982.53	3	27.50	3	220.50	2	-	1	-	8	2,484.04	2	-			\$ 38,364.11	237		
February	9	2,400.09	7	361.50	2	-	3	1,807.81	1	-	6	189.00	0	-			\$ 39,718.77	220		
March	7	1,668.18	6	20.50	2	120.50	1	609.60	0	-	11	4,139.00	0	-			\$ 50,430.63	249		
April	15	8,271.47	2	41.00	2	200.00	1	1,500.00	0	-	6	1,504.55	2	300.00			\$ 66,863.73	248		
May	11	4,557.82	10	1,639.11	7	1,420.50	0	-	1	-	3	1,533.56	2	300.00	(1,382.43)	\$ 49,890.19	250			
June	10	5,957.91	4	141.00	5	2,408.58	2	198.51	0	-	3	327.50	1	300.00			\$ 49,207.16	278		
July	20	3,826.69	3	2,284.82	5	182.00	1	-	2	4,500.00	5	200.00	3	1,400.00	(1,400.00)	\$ 78,377.22	327			
August	29	10,345.80	11	961.50	2	-	4	806.49	3	-	2	620.50	1	865.61			\$ 93,844.32	385		
September	23	3,168.58	8	1,302.50	4	3,701.23	0	-	2	-	8	5,196.30	6	620.50	320.50	\$ 98,600.85	396			
October	15	6,618.63	15	5,560.50	6	2,640.96	2	1,050.00	2	800.00	7	4,312.02	4	900.00	-	\$ 111,759.28	339			
November	8	6,125.34	6	1,200.51	1	-	0	-	3	2,019.29	6	3,602.34	2	-	45,802.40	\$ 121,907.74	256			
Total	171	57,340.36	81	15,997.44	40	11,014.77	17	7,372.41	15	7,319.29	73	26,891.94	27	8,410.15	43,340.47	\$ 849,822.95	3428			

Veterans by Race



- Caucasian
- African American/Black
- Latine / Hispanic
- Asian
- Hawaiian / Pacific Islander / Other
- American Indian/ Alaskan Native

RACE & GENDER REPORT

FY 2025	Caucasian	African American/ Black	Latine / Hispanic	Asian	Hawaiian / Pacific Islander / Other	American Indian/ Alaskan Native	Total Race	Male Veterans	Female Veterans	Other Veterans	Total Gender
DECEMBER	27	203	11	0	2	0	243	218	25	0	243
JANUARY	26	199	11	0	0	1	237	213	24	0	237
FEBRUARY	22	189	9	0	0	0	220	200	20	0	220
MARCH	32	199	16	0	2	0	249	222	27	0	249
APRIL	20	214	12	0	2	0	248	215	33	0	248
MAY	25	215	9	0	1	0	250	218	32	0	250
JUNE	34	226	14	0	4	0	278	246	32	0	278
JULY	30	265	30	1	1	0	327	287	40	0	327
AUGUST	38	305	40	1	1	0	385	304	81	0	385
SEPTEMBER	45	325	26	0	0	0	396	329	67	0	396
OCTOBER	34	275	30	0	0	0	339	285	54	0	339
NOVEMBER	19	217	20	0	0	0	256	222	34	0	256
TOTAL	352	2832	228	2	13	1	3428	2959	469	0	3428

XI. FY2026 OUTLOOK

FY25 marked a defining period of growth, stabilization, and strategic advancement for the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County and represented a transition from recovery and restructuring to sustained operational maturity, expanded access, and measurable impact across Cook County's Veteran community.

Looking ahead, Fiscal Year 2026 represents a critical next phase in the continued evolution of the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County. Building upon the operational advancements, service expansions, and infrastructure investments realized in FY25, the Commission will enter the new year well positioned to move from foundational growth into sustained, system-level impact for Cook County Veterans and their families.

The priorities for FY26 are grounded in a clear objective: to strengthen service delivery at scale while ensuring equity, accountability, and accessibility across all regions of Cook County. As demand for services continues to rise amid ongoing economic pressures, the VACCC will focus on refining existing programs, expanding access points, and enhancing internal capacity to meet Veterans where they are, both geographically and functionally.

A central focus of FY26 will be the continued expansion and stabilization of the Veterans Service Officer (VSO) program. With accredited claims operations successfully reestablished in FY25, FY26 will emphasize increasing claims capacity, reducing wait times, and expanding geographic coverage through additional VSO staffing and community-based service delivery. This growth is expected to significantly increase the return on investment to Cook County by securing earned federal benefits for Veterans, while also strengthening long-term financial stability for Veteran households.

FY26 will also prioritize the optimization of physical service locations. The VAC Chicago

Regional Office (CRO) will continue to serve as a specialized, trauma-informed hub for Military Sexual Trauma (MST) and other special-emphasis claims, while the Hamilton Headquarters Chicago (HHC) location will remain the central processing site for financial assistance. As operational readiness allows, the Commission anticipates expanding its footprint to additional locations, including courthouse-based and municipal service points, further reducing barriers to access and increasing visibility countywide.

Technology and data modernization will remain a core pillar of FY26 planning. The VACCC will continue refining digital intake, case tracking, and reporting systems to improve accuracy, transparency, and performance measurement across all departments. These enhancements will allow the Commission to better identify service trends, allocate resources strategically, and report outcomes with greater precision to County and State stakeholders.

Outreach efforts in FY26 will shift from expansion to optimization. Building on the successful VetConnect and VetTalk models launched in FY25, the Commission will focus on consistency, predictability, and deeper community integration. Emphasis will be placed on recurring service locations, stronger partner coordination, and targeted engagement with underserved Cook County Veteran populations, including Women Veterans, aging Veterans, justice-involved Veterans, and those with complex benefit needs.

Staffing and internal capacity will continue to be addressed thoughtfully in FY26. While staffing levels remain limited relative to the size of the Veteran population served, the VACCC will prioritize workflow efficiency, cross-functional training, and strategic use of technology to maximize impact without compromising service quality. As facility renovations and digitization efforts progress, the Commission will prepare for future staffing expansion aligned with operational readiness and long-term sustainability.

In addition, FY26 will further solidify the VACCC's role as a system-level advocate for

Veterans. Through continued collaboration with County leadership, State agencies, federal partners, and community organizations, the Commission will work to identify structural barriers, reduce duplication of services, and promote policies that improve access, coordination, and outcomes for Veterans across Cook County.

In summary, FY26 is positioned as a year of deliberate consolidation and forward momentum. The Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County will expand access more equitably, and deepen its impact across the Veteran community. Guided by data, driven by collaboration, and anchored in its mission, the VACCC remains committed to ensuring every Cook County Veteran receives the support, advocacy, and respect they have earned.



XII. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC): A tax-free monetary benefit paid to eligible survivors of military service members who died in the line of duty or eligible survivors of veterans whose death resulted from a service-related injury or disease.

Disability Compensation: A tax-free monetary benefit paid to veterans with disabilities that are the result of a disease or injury incurred in or aggravated during active military service.

Intent-to-File: An application for veterans and survivors who intend to file a claim for VA compensation, pension, or survivors' benefits which preserves the effective date of future benefits while the claimant is gathering supporting documentation for their formal claim.

Pension: A tax-free needs-based monetary benefit paid to wartime veterans, who meet certain age or non-service-connected disability requirements.

Pension Management Center: A department at certain VA Regional Offices that is responsible for processing and adjudicating claims for pension, survivor's pension, dependency and indemnity compensation, and burial benefits.

Survivor's Pension: A tax-free needs-based monetary benefit payable to a low-income, un-remarried surviving spouse and/or unmarried child(ren) of a deceased wartime veteran.

Veterans Service Officer: An individual who is accredited by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs who assists veterans and their dependents in the filing of claims, and advocacy for, benefits with the VA.

XIII. References

1. **Veterans by State 2024.**

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/cookcountyillinois/PST045223>

2. **VA Compensation by County Report (Data Catalog, search by county**

<https://www.va.gov/vetdata/expenditures.asp>