



VETERANS ASSISTANCE COMMISSION OF COOK COUNTY

Meeting Minutes
16 December 2025 @1900hr
AMVETS Post 192

7731 S Harlem Ave. Bridgeview, IL

Executive Board Members: Frank Gutierrez (*President*), William Browne (*1st Vice President*), Dutch DeGroot (*2nd Vice President*), Robert Arciola (*Treasurer*)

At Large Board Members: Greg Jacobs, Jesus Segura, Evamarie Duff

Appointees: Jim Parker (*Secretary*), Peter Hirt (*Judge Advocate*), Randall Tyner (*Sergeant at Arms*)

Superintendent: Elizabeth D. Soto

I. Call to Order — President Gutierrez

- a. Call to order at 1910hrs.
- b. Roll Call/Quorum — 2nd VP DeGroot announced a quorum is attending per the sign in sheet. A copy of the Attendance Sign In Sheet is attached to and a part of these Minutes.
- c. Recognition of Guests - President Gutierrez
 - Tiffany Perry from Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs
 - Maria Gallo, Chief of Staff for Cook County Commissioner Maggie Trevor
 - Eric Armstrong, Director of Cook County Veterans Affairs
 - Tommy Hansen, Congressional candidate for Illinois 5th District

II. Opening Reflection — Art Ellingsen for Chaplain Kevin Ake

- a. Prayer/Reflection.
- b. Pledge of Allegiance.

III. Consent Agenda — President Gutierrez.

- a. Approval of Minutes of 23 September 2025 Membership Meeting. The Minutes were not read but were distributed to all members in advance of the meeting. A motion to approve the Minutes, was made by Art Ellingsen and seconded by Evamarie Duff. The motion was passed by unanimous voice vote.

IV. Public Comment.

- a. Jim Schultz US Army Chaplain Major Edward Vattman historical monument in disrepair at Fort Sheridan National Cemetery. It has been a very frustrating campaigner to get this repaired. Pete Hirt asked if the VA didn't have a preservation committee. Schultz replied that they do but have been unresponsive.

V. Governance Report — Treasurer Robert Arciola

- a. Treasurer Robert Arceola reported a current balance of \$5,118.07 for the 501(c)(3) organization, with deposits of \$89.50 made at the end of September. No other transactions occurred during the reporting period.
A motion to approve the report, was made by Jim Schultz and seconded by Bill Starr. The motion was passed by unanimous voice vote.

VI. VACCC Office Reports — Superintendent Elizabeth Soto

a. Veterans Assistance Commission Operations Report. Superintendent Soto

- Fourth Quarter Financial Performance Record Achievement: October 2024 marked a historic milestone with **\$111,759.28** in direct financial assistance provided - the highest monthly amount in VACCC history

- Total Q4 Assistance: **\$332,267.87** distributed to support 991 veterans, including 181 new veterans to the VACCC

- Annual Total: **\$849,822.95** in direct assistance provided to **3,428** Cook County veterans in FY 25

- Growth: 50% increase in overall assistance compared to Q3, with significant growth in rental, food, and personal hygiene aid

b. Staffing and Budget Updates. Superintendent Soto

- FY 26 Budget**: \$3.2 million total budget with approximately \$1 million dedicated to direct veteran services

- Staffing: Approved for 20 full-time employees (increased from 15 in FY 25)

- Office Locations:

- Hamilton Headquarters: 1100 South Hamilton (lower level)

- Chicago Regional Office: 69 West Washington, Suite 1420

- Future Rolling Meadows location under renovation

c. Veteran Services Program Derek C. Giffin Manager, Veteran Services

- Fourth Quarter Performance

- Powers of Attorney**: 290 designations

- Intent to File**: 196 submissions

- New Compensation Claims: 121 filed

- Appeals and Reviews: 95 filings

VA System Improvements

- Backlog Reduction: VA reduced veterans benefits backlog by 57%

- Processing Records: VA processed 3.01 million disability compensation and pension claims in FY 25

- AI Implementation: New artificial intelligence procedures significantly reduced claim processing times

- New Staff Addition Ferris Corroboration joined as the newest VSO, bringing 10 years of experience as a Rating Veterans Service Representative at the Chicago VA Regional Office and military service as a US Army tank crew member and aviation operations specialist.

d. Outreach and Communications Conner Intress Communications & Outreach Manager

- Fourth Quarter Achievements

- Events: **67** total events (breaking previous records)

- Veteran Interactions: Over **1,000** veterans engaged

- Technology Integration: 482 unique veterans used the automated intake system, requesting **2,145** individual services

- Digital Innovation

- QR Code Tracking**: Implemented location-based tracking showing 482 intake scans, 327 website visits, and 128 Facebook page visits

- Automated System**: New streamlined process provides immediate email responses with resources and partner connections

- Resource Guide: Updated comprehensive resource book available in digital flip-book format

- Commission Request System

New QR code-based request system implemented for board and commission members to submit questions and suggestions, improving transparency and response tracking.

A motion to approve the report, was made by Jim Schultz and seconded by Evamarie Duff. Discussion commenced on several topics relating to this agenda item (Please refer to the full video on our website vaccookcounty.org). Further questions that time did not allow for are encouraged to be sent via QR code to our staff.

The motion was passed by unanimous voice vote.

VII. Bylaws — Chairman Arciola presented proposed bylaw amendments, including revisions to Article V, Section 5.6, related to attendance and membership suspension.

Following discussion, the proposed amendments were tabled to allow for revisions and legal review, with final action deferred to a future membership meeting.

VIII. Budget — 1st VP Brown. No report.

IX. Services Provided — No report George Gandara and Chevonne Woodward.

X. Unfinished Business — President Gutierrez

a. Report on the Membership Corporation. Tabled.

XI. New Business — President Gutierrez

a. Proposal for Announcing Candidates for VACCC Board – 2026

The membership discussed an optional process allowing board candidates to submit biographies in advance of the March election meeting. No formal action was taken.

b. Staff Deployment Policy The Board recommendation directing VAC staff to prioritize outreach and service delivery at locations serving the greatest number of veterans was presented.

A motion was made 2nd VP DeGroot, seconded by Jim Schultz, and approved by voice vote, adopting the policy.

XII. Good of the Order — President Gutierrez.

a. Art Ellingsen introduced Tommy Hansen and also talked about volunteering to be an election judge.

b. Tommy Hansen spoke briefly on his candidacy and military service of his family.

XIII. Future Meeting Sites Update — 2nd VP DeGroot wished everyone a Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah. Thanked all the members that attended and stressed the importance of being an active member.

The date will be 24 March 2026 @ 1900 hr. at a location TBA.

XIV. Comments from Special Guest as some wished to speak and missed Public Comment they were allowed to comment.

a. George Gandara on some of his homeless veteran initiatives and outreach.

b. Evamarie Duff on military sexual trauma initiatives by the VACCC and Justyna Berry elaborated on the program.

c. Cook County Department of Veterans Affairs (CCVA) director Eric Armstrong. Talked about their event at Brookfield Zoo this fall.

XV. Adjournment — President Gutierrez

President Gutierrez closed with a thank you to the Board, Members and guests for their contributions to a very productive meeting. Upon a proper Motion by Bill Starr, duly seconded by Evamarie Duff, the meeting was adjourned at 2049 hrs. by unanimous voice vote.

Submitted by Dutch DeGroot for *Jim Parker*, Secretary



VACCC MEMBERSHIP SIGN IN SHEET

16 DECEMBER 2025 MEETING

Sheet 1 of 2

Organization	X	Delegate	X	Alternate Delegate
American Legion 36		Patrick Flannigan		Gregory Jacobs
American Legion 87		Willie Mack		Ashley Shine
American Legion 104	X	Dennis Chavez	X	Michael F Tuman
American Legion 183	X	Ray Toczek		Timothy Bodkin
American Legion 208	X	Greg Padovani	X	Walter Parus
American Legion 216		Kevin Ake		
American Legion 335		Lorenzo Fiorentino		Chuy Segura
American Legion 478		Beverly Fitch		Nickola Rogers
American Legion 525	X	William "Bill" Starr	X	Laura Matuszak
American Legion 615	X	Ken McClory	X	John Kaminecki
American Legion 687	X	Eugene Weaver		Alejandro Segoviano
American Legion 758		Beau D. Butts	X	Frank Gutierrez
American Legion 806		Al Pizarro	X	Pete Hirt
American Legion 829	X	Chevonne Woodward		Ray Doeksen
American Legion 888		Anthony Muro		Andy Anderson
American Legion 923	X	Clemente E. Rodriguez	X	John Kerrigan
American Legion 943		John Steciw		Adam Bihun
American Legion 973		Eden Puente		
American Legion 974	X	Anthony Siciliano	X	Thomas Zito
American Legion 1052		Megan Everett		Brian Phenegar
American Legion 1941		Robert Stoltz	X	Edward Krzeminski
American Legion 1932		Charles Salley	X	James McGee Jr.
American Legion 1983	X	Frank Kelly	X	Antony (Tony) Thomas
American Legion 1987		Charles Henderson		Ron Bellamy
AMVETS 66	X	James Schultz		James (Jim) Parker
AMVETS 268	X	Eddie Brown Jr.	X	Richard Nielson



VACCC MEMBERSHIP SIGN IN SHEET

16 DECEMBER 2025 MEETING

Sheet 2 of 2

Organization	X	Delegate	X	Alternate Delegate
DAV Chapter 33	X	Todd Moore		Joseph J. Donovan
DAV Chapter 84	X	Kenneth Boor		William Byers
Jewish War Veterans710		Dr. Jerry Field	X	Dennis Kane
Marine Corps L 553	X	Randall L. Tyner		Paul Zogg
Marine Corps L 1408	X	George Gandara		Alejandro Morales
Mil Order WW		Zhi Cheng Chen		
MOAA	X	Matthew Garrison		Roman Golash
Navy League 69		Leo Alicea		
PVA Vaughan	X	Robert Arciola		Robert Statam
Polish Legion 72		David Piecuch		
VFW Post 311	X	Bill Browne		Aretha Spurlock
VFW Post 981	X	Stewart Abbink		Larry Blieski
VFW Post 1337	X	John "Dutch" DeGroot		Wally Beckman
VFW Post 2202		John Healy		Joseph Wein
VFW Post 2868	X	Eric Morales	X	Evamarie Duff
VFW Post 2978		Ray Doeksen		Scott Frit
VFW Post 3579		Keith Renner	X	Ramon Prieto
VFW Post 5079		Tom Hoskinson		Antonio Munoz IV
VFW Post 5151		Phil "Chappy" Ferrer		
VFW Post 5979		Richard Wojewnik	X	David Ruiz
VFW Post 7186	X	Thomas J. "Jim" Hughes		Elliott Jones
VFW Post 8322	X	Paul J. Bezazian		Paul Knudtson
VFW Post 9284	X	Arthur J. Ellingsen		Wallace Campbell
VFW Post 10778		Chuck Bosko		
VVA 242	X	Kevin Calkins		John Andres
SFA 37		Mitchell Janik		Patrick Crimmins
33 of 51 organizaions		25 Delegates 16 alternates 41 total		



VACCC FY2025
4th Quarter Report

December 16, 2025
Superintendent Elizabeth D. Soto

MISSION

"...for the just, necessary, and needed assistance and services of military Veterans, who served in the Armed Forces of the United States..."

Veterans and Service Members (330 ILCS 45/) Military Veterans Assistance Act

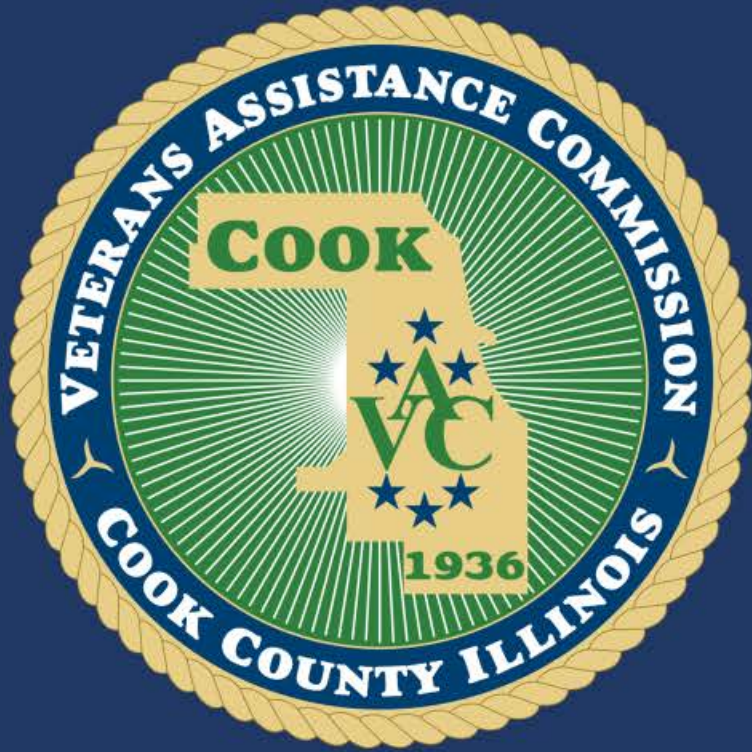
Q4 FINANCIAL REPORT

FY26 ORG CHART & BUDGET

VSO REPORT

OUTREACH REPORT





Q4 Financial Report

PERSONNEL SERVICES

PERSONNEL SERVICES	SEPTEMBER 2025	OCTOBER 2025	NOVEMBER 2025	4TH QTR FY 2025 ACTUAL
501010-Sal-Wag of Reg Employees	\$ 76,217.05	\$ 78,622.37	\$ 81,252.79	\$ 236,092.21
501030-Salary/Turnover Adjustment				\$ -
501511-Mandatory Medicare Cost	\$ 1,074.75	\$ 1,108.07	\$ 1,146.26	\$ 3,329.08
501590-Group Life Insurance	\$ 31.41	\$ 31.41	\$ 31.41	\$ 94.23
501610-Group Health Insurance	\$ 1,320.31	\$ 1,320.31	\$ 1,320.31	\$ 3,960.93
501640-Group Dental Insurance	\$ 111.74	\$ 111.74	\$ 111.74	\$ 335.22
501660-Unemployment Compensation	\$ 10.50	\$ 10.50	\$ 10.50	\$ 31.50
501690-Vision Care	\$ 19.51	\$ 19.51	\$ 19.51	\$ 58.53
501715-Group Pharmacy Insurance	\$ 565.78	\$ 565.78	\$ 565.78	\$ 1,697.34
SUBTOTAL: PERSONNEL SERVICES	\$ 79,351.05	\$ 81,789.69	\$ 84,458.30	\$ 245,599.04

Note: The Personnel and Operations expenditures are subject to change as month-end entries may not be posted/processed at the time of the data run.

OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE

OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE	SEPTEMBER 2025	OCTOBER 2025	NOVEMBER 2025	4TH QTR FY 2025 ACTUAL
501790-Prof /Tech Membership Fees		\$ 50.00		\$ 50.00
501805-Training Program Staff	\$ 15,200.00	\$ 400.00		\$ 15,600.00
501836-Transportation and Travel Expenses	\$ 341.15	\$ 634.36	\$ 139.80	\$ 1,115.31
520150-Communication Services				\$ -
520260-Postage		\$ 312.00		\$ 312.00
520490-External Graphics and Reproduction Services	\$ 157.50			\$ 157.50
520830-Professional Services	\$ 63,685.55	\$ 62,439.40	\$ 1,293.75	\$ 127,418.70
521054-Legal Services		\$ 2,077.20	\$ 930.00	\$ 3,007.20
530605-Office Supplies	\$ 2,237.65	\$ 2,784.00	\$ 3,589.15	\$ 8,610.80
540130-Maintenance and Subscription Services				\$ -
Bank Fees - Amalgamated Bank	\$ 102.58	\$ 102.06	\$ 165.18	\$ 369.82
Other	\$ 312.46			
SUBTOTAL: OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE	\$ 82,036.89	\$ 68,799.02	\$ 6,117.88	\$ 156,641.33
TOTAL	\$ 259,988.79	\$ 262,347.99	\$ 212,483.92	\$ 734,820.70

Note: The Personnel and Operations expenditures are subject to change as month-end entries may not be posted/processed at the time of the data run.

DIRECT DISBURSEMENTS

SPECIAL PROGRAMS	SEPTEMBER 2025	OCTOBER 2025	NOVEMBER 2025	4TH QTR FY 2025 ACTUAL
521313 - Special or Coop Programs (Veteran Disbursements) - Reimbursement	\$ 98,600.85	\$ 111,759.28	\$ 74,907.74	\$ 285,267.87
521313 - Special or Coop Programs (Paid through AP) - Not Reimbursed			\$ 47,000.00	\$ 47,000.00
SUBTOTAL: SPECIAL PROGRAMS	\$ 98,600.85	\$ 111,759.28	\$ 121,907.74	\$ 332,267.87

AGENCY STATISTICS FY2025	SEPTEMBER 2025	OCTOBER 2025	NOVEMBER 2025	TOTAL
Veterans In Office Visits	396	339	256	991
Calls Handled	501	688	382	1571
Outreach Events	27	4	36	67
New Veterans	86	54	41	181

QoQ

Assistance Description	3rd Qtr (\$)	4th Qtr (\$)	% QoQ
CTA Single Ride	1,369.50	1,980.00	44.58%
CTA 7-Day	6,355.00	5,863.00	-7.74%
Mortgage	29,704.30	31,356.24	5.56%
Rent	28,689.95	63,084.60	119.88%
Electric	32,447.75	31,781.11	-2.05%
Gas	25,782.61	21,211.13	-17.73%
Water	3,823.55	5,319.68	39.13%
Phone	949.47	149.65	-84.24%
Internet	706.57	614.13	-13.08%
Food Cards	42,800.00	60,900.00	42.29%
Work Attire	100.00	200.00	100.00%
Personal Hygiene Cards	30,200.00	36,700.00	21.52%
Gas Cards	500.00	300.00	-40.00%
Burial & Memorial	18,000.00	72,808.33	304.49%
Total	221,428.70	332,267.87	50.06%

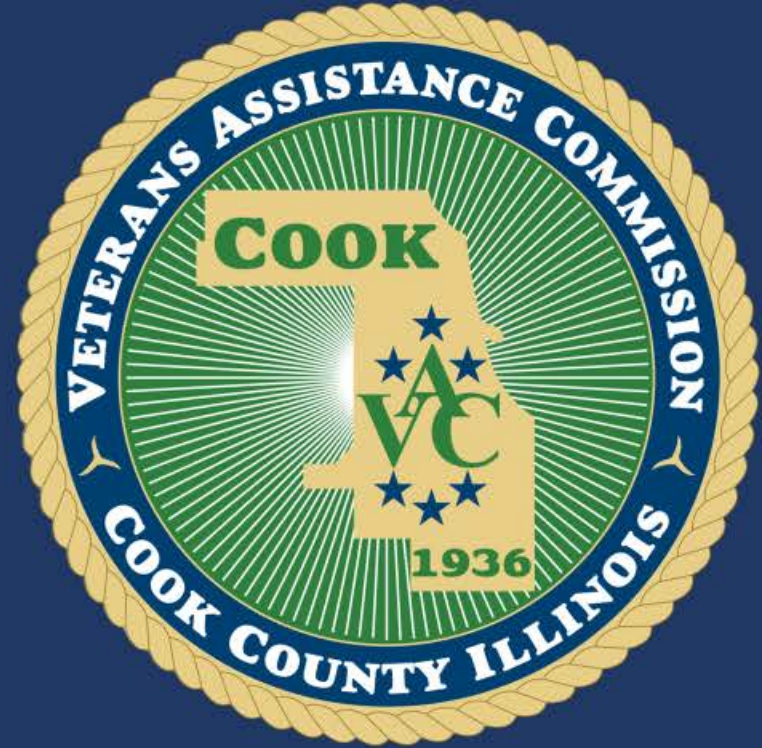
Financial Disbursements

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		

FY26 Org Chart & Budget



Position	Employee
Veteran Service Officer	Karadsheh Faris
Manager, Communications & Outreach	Intress Conner Haig
Manager, Finance and Business Operations	Samuel Rajeev
Manager, Veterans Services	Giffin Derek
Manager, Veterans Services	Berry Justyna
Communications & Outreach Coordinator	Calderon Julian
Veterans Service Caseworker	Shaw Krystal
Veterans Service Caseworker	Bencak Peter
Administrative Assistant IV	Duarte Coral
Administrative Assistant IV	Meadows Vanessa
Deputy Superintendent	Jacobson Grant
Superintendent	Soto Elizabeth
Manager, Veterans Services	VACANT
Veteran Service Officer	VACANT
Veteran Service Officer	VACANT
Administrative Assistant IV	VACANT - NEW POSITION
Veteran Service Officer	VACANT - NEW POSITION
Veteran Service Officer	VACANT - NEW POSITION
Veteran Service Officer	VACANT - NEW POSITION
Manager, Communications & Outreach	VACANT - NEW POSITION

Position	Employee	Update
Veteran Service Officer	Karadsheh Faris	
Manager, Communications & Outreach	Intress Conner Haig - RECLASSIFYING	Chief of Staff
Manager, Finance and Business Operations	Samuel Rajeev	
Manager, Veterans Services	Giffin Derek	
Manager, Veterans Services	Berry Justyna	69 W Washington
Communications & Outreach Coordinator	Calderon Julian	69 W Washington
Veterans Service Caseworker	Shaw Krystal	
Veterans Service Caseworker	Bencak Peter	
Administrative Assistant IV	Duarte Coral	
Administrative Assistant IV	Meadows Vanessa	
Deputy Superintendent	Jacobson Grant	
Superintendent	Soto Elizabeth	
Manager, Veterans Services	VACANT - RECLASSIFYING	1 Administrative Assistant IV &
-		1 Communications and Outreach Coordinator Positions
Veteran Service Officer	VACANT	69 W Washington
Veteran Service Officer	VACANT	69 W Washington
Administrative Assistant IV	VACANT - NEW POSITION	69 W Washington
Veteran Service Officer	VACANT - NEW POSITION	
Veteran Service Officer	VACANT - NEW POSITION	
Veteran Service Officer	VACANT - NEW POSITION	
Manager, Communications & Outreach	VACANT - NEW POSITION - RECLASSIFYING	Finance and Business Operations Bureau Chief

Object Account	FY26 Adjusted Budget
Sal/Wag of Reg Employees- Including Benefits	1,766,035.49
Prof /Tech Membership Fees	16,024.40
Training Program Staff	26,921.38
Transportation and Travel Expenses	77,949.20
Communication Services	9,686.00
Postage	1,940.00
External Graphics and Reproduction Services	11,640.00
Professional Services	194,000.00
Legal Services	72,750.00
Special or Coop Programs	970,000.00
Office Supplies	48,500.00
Maintenance and Subscription Services	2,469.95
	3,197,916.42

Q4

September, October, November

VSO Report





Strategic Objectives FY25

VSO Mission Statement

The Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County provides clear, accurate, and accredited representation for Veterans and their families across all VA benefits.

Our VSO Program guides Veterans through claims, appeals, and complex benefit pathways with professionalism, integrity, and a commitment to securing the outcomes they have earned.

We work to remove barriers, strengthen the quality of every submission, and ensure that every Veteran receives the support and advocacy they deserve.

FY2025 Key Objective :

Build the operational tools, workflows, and standards necessary for consistent, efficient VSO service delivery in FY25.

Key Strategies:

- **Create standard VSO workflows** for intake, claim development, documentation, and follow-up so all Veterans receive predictable, high-quality service.
- **Establish basic tracking and reporting tools** to monitor claims submitted and Veteran engagement as the program expands.
- **Strengthen communication and coordination** between VSOs, leadership, and partner agencies to ensure Veterans are never left without support or guidance.
- **Provide foundational training** in core benefits (compensation, pension, PACT Act basics, health care enrollment) to ensure VSOs are confident and consistent in early service delivery.



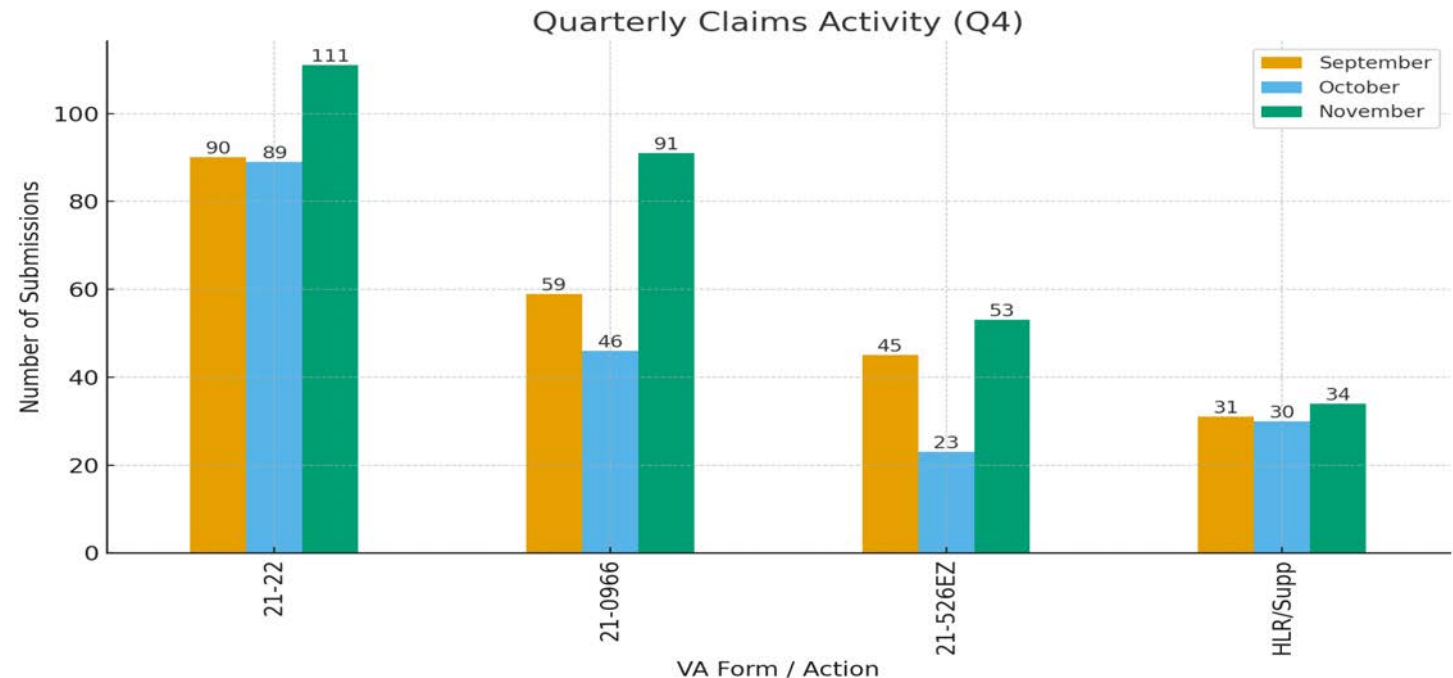
VSO Q4 Data Breakdown

By the Numbers

The Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County continued strong claims activity throughout Q4.

- Power of Attorney designations remained high at 290 for the quarter, reflecting increased engagements and new Veteran enrollments.
- Intent to File submissions totaled 196, signaling a steady pipeline of future claims.
- New compensation claims submitted via VA Form 21-526EZ reached 121, while Appeals and Decision Reviews accounted for 95 filings.
- Overall, the numbers point to consistent outreach, higher Veteran contact, and strong case development heading into the next quarter.

VA Form / Action	Description	Sept	Oct	Nov	Q4 Total
VA Form 21-22	Power of Attorney	90	89	111	290
VA Form 21-0966	Intent to File	59	46	91	196
VA Form 21-526EZ	New Claims	45	23	53	121
Appeals / Decision Reviews	Higher-Level Review / Supplemental	31	30	34	95





What's happening in the VA?

VA reduces backlog of Veterans waiting for VA benefits by 57%

A VA claim for compensation or pension is considered backlogged once it has been pending for more than 125 days. The backlog reduction VA announced was made possible through a series of record-breaking production milestones, including:

What this means for VSOs, Veterans, Caregivers, and Survivors

- This means that the VA is moving faster than ever with decisions on new claims and appeals.
- Please submit all required evidence at the front of end of submission. (such as private medical evidence, statements, and supporting evidence)
- If the VA is requesting from you, please submit timely.

- VA processed an all-time high of **3,001,734** disability compensation and pension claims in fiscal year 2025 - shattering the previous record of 2.49 million set in FY 2024.
- VA processed **one million disability claims** by Feb. 20 - faster than ever before in a given fiscal year.
- VA had its single most productive claims processing day, May 29, with **15,364** claims processed. In July, VA processed the highest number of claims in a month in history, with **300,799** claims processed.
- 12-month claims processing accuracy also improved to **93.5%** in September 2025, up from 91.6% in October 2024.
- VA's record-breaking FY 2025 performance also included distributing **\$195 billion** in compensation and pension benefit payments to more than **6.9 million** Veterans and survivors.



FY26 Looking a Year Ahead

Strengthen VSO Credentialing, Access, and Reporting

Expand VACCC Service Locations

- VACVSO@cookcountyil.gov- contact email for VSO at VACCC.
- Grow the 69 W. Washington, Suite 1420 office into a **Military Sexual Trauma (MST) specialty emphasis location**, providing dedicated support and trauma-informed services. VSO Manager Justyna Berry.
- Open the **Rolling Meadows VACCC location** to expand access for Veterans in the Northwest region of Cook County. VSO Manager, Derek Giffin.

- Ensure **all VSOs are accredited through NACVSO** by the end of FY26.
- Complete full **VA system credentialing** for every VSO (PIV card, background clearance, encryption requirements).
- Provide **VA system access and training** to increase efficiency, accuracy, and Veteran support capabilities.
- Implement consistent **Vetra Spec documentation and updates** across all VSO activities to support countywide reporting, accountability, and performance tracking.
- **1100 S. Hamilton Lower-Level Chicago IL** is open Monday-Friday 8:30-4:30 (in person appointments Wednesday & Thursday)(Virtual Fridays) phone number 312-433-6010
- **69 W. Washington Suite 1420 Chicago IL** is open Monday-Friday 8:30-4:30 (in-person appointments Wednesday & Thursday.) (Virtual Fridays) phone number 312-603-3865



Welcome Our New Veteran Service Officer Faris Karadsheh!



VSO Q4 Department Updates

Faris joins the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County with a unique blend of federal claims expertise, military service, and a deep commitment to Veteran advocacy. He served **ten years** as a **Rating Veterans Service Representative (RVSR)** at the Chicago VA Regional Office, where he evaluated claims, applied the VA Schedule for Rating Disabilities, and issued rating decisions shaping outcomes for countless Veterans.

Faris is a **U.S. Army Veteran** who served as a 19K M1A2 Abrams Tank Crewmember at Fort Carson and as a 15P Aviation Operations Specialist at Hunter Army Airfield, including a deployment to Iraq. He holds a B.A. in Applied Psychology from UIC, strengthening his communication, administrative, and decision-making skills.

Known for integrity, detail orientation, and dedication to Veteran care, Faris is a tremendous addition to the VACCC.

Q4

September, October, November

Outreach Report





Outreach Department Mission Statement

The Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County (VACCC) is committed to meeting Veterans where they are - delivering accredited services with intention, urgency, and equity. Through strategic, data-driven outreach, we engage Veterans in their own communities, prioritize underserved populations, and ensure timely, inclusive access to the benefits they've earned. Our work is grounded in action, guided by outcomes, and designed to close gaps - not wait for Veterans to navigate them alone.

Strategic Objectives FY25

Expand Community-Based Access to Veteran Services

Objective:

Deliver services directly to Veterans through trusted, accessible locations across Cook County.

Key Strategies:

- Establish permanent and rotating outreach schedules in underserved areas.
- Prioritize visibility at community events, shelters, churches, and Veteran-focused hubs.
- Eliminate access barriers by bringing services to Veterans instead of waiting for them to come forward.

Optimize Services Through Data and Responsiveness

Objective:

Use real-time data and outcome tracking to guide decisions, allocate resources efficiently, and adapt quickly to emerging Veteran needs.

Key Strategies:

- Make data-informed decisions on staffing, programming, and outreach deployment.
- Maintain responsiveness as a core standard – ensuring Veterans get answers and action, not delays.




Q4 Data Breakdown


QR Code Tracking Data

Metrics gathered through a program which tracks how often people use our QR codes. Captures areas scanned from, unique scans, as well as which QR codes they use.


- Intake Form QR Code Scan: **482**
- VACCC Web Page: **327**
- VACCC Facebook Page: **128**

Connect
with us




 VACCC
[HTTPS://HOVQR.TO/85B40922](https://hovqr.to/85B40922)

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@cookcountyil.gov



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

<https://hovqr.to/de421623>



Intake System Metric Breakdown

Metrics gathered through MS Forms. Form captures name, number, email, and service request, but does not verify identity.

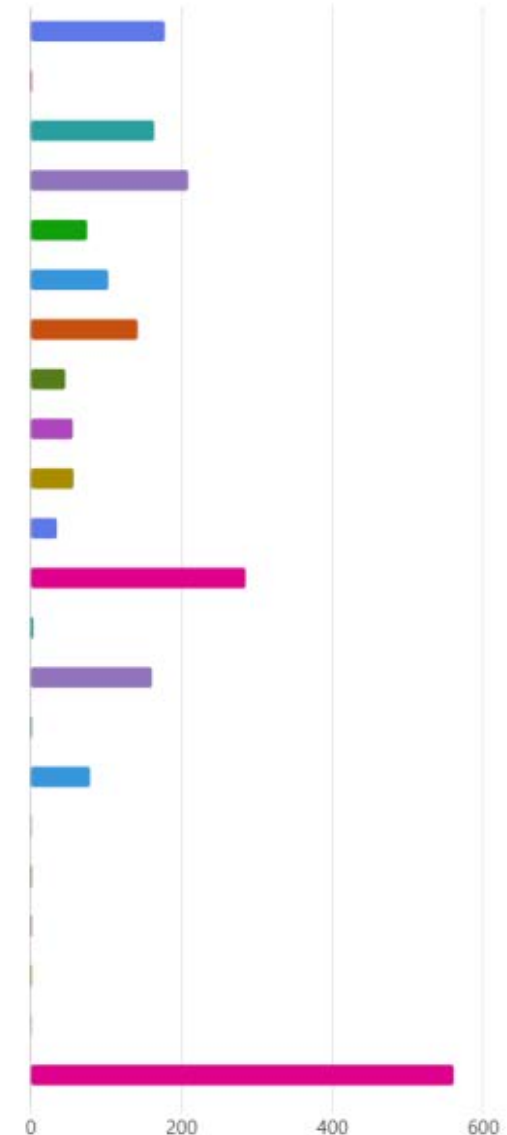
Total Assisted (all categories of intake form submissions since start of program): 482

Total individual services requested: 2,145

Note: May include duplicates. Used as indicator of outreach interest.

Q4 Data Breakdown

Rent/Mortgage Financial Assistance	177
Mental Health Services / Readjustment counseling (This will prompt contact from the...	1
Utilities (Electric/Gas/Water)	163
Food Assistance (Hundred Dollar Gift Cards)	208
Weekly Bus Cards - CTA/PACE	74
Vehicle Gas Cards	102
Hygiene card	141
Funeral/Burial Financial Assistance	45
Phone/Landline Financial Assistance	55
Internet Financial Assistance	56
Records Request (State and Federal)	34
File a claim	284
VA Benefits (This will prompt contact from VA)	3
State and Local Veteran Benefits	160
Housing Assistance (Homelessness) (This will prompt contact from VA)	1
Employment Assistance	78
Womens clinic (This will prompt contact from VA)	0
LGBTQ+ healthcare access (this will prompt contact from VA)	1
Military Sexual Trauma (MST) (This will prompt contact from VA)	1
Discharge upgrade - (This will prompt contact from the UIC School of Law)	1
Education Benefits (this will prompt contact from VA)	0
Other	560





Intake System Updates

The intake form is now **100% outward-facing** and is no longer used by VACCC staff for internal intake or routing.

It is exclusively designed for Veterans, survivors, and family members to directly request services online or through our marketing materials.

Q4 Intake Form Updates

Expand Access to Services and Increased Response Times

- **New service request categories have been added including:** Mental Health Services, VA Benefits Modification (auto-routed directly to the VA), Housing Assistance, LGBTQ+ Support, Military Sexual Trauma (MST), Discharge Upgrades, and Education Benefits with partners at UIC, Loyola and Prairie State.
- **Automatic confirmation and document-prep guidance is now built in.** When a Veteran selects one of our services, they immediately receive a response from us outlining the services requested and what documents they need to bring or prepare.
- **Direct partner referrals for non-VACCC services.** If a Veteran selects a service that VACCC does not directly provide, the request is automatically routed to a trusted partner organization, which will follow up with the Veteran within **24–48 hours** to ensure immediate support.



Scan NOW to see
the New Version!



Physical Copies will be coming
soon!

Link: [Online Flipbook](#)

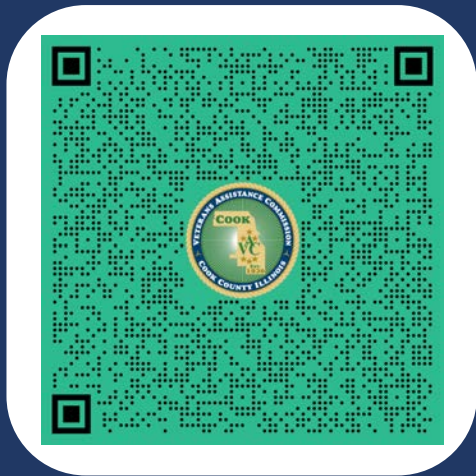
Q4 Updated Resource Guide

Streamlined with Everything you Need

- **The VACCC Resource Booklet has been fully reorganized** to evenly highlight VACCC services, IDVA programs, VA services, and partner resources in a clear, user-friendly format.
- **Core VACCC services are now centralized**, including Emergency Financial Services (EFS), Claims & Benefits Assistance, Partner Referrals, VSO appointment requests, and Outreach Event Requests.
- **Dedicated sections for IDVA and VA services now provide clear breakdowns of benefits**, flagship programs, medical care, mental health services, home care, and education assistance.
- **A new digital Partner Resource Booklet is being launched**, giving Veterans direct QR-code access to trusted partner organizations for immediate help.
- **Expanded QR codes and links throughout now connect Veterans to services**, scheduling, and location details for all VACCC, IDVA, and VA offices.



If you want to reach out to our team, scan this QR Code now!



Physical Copies will be coming soon!

Q4 Commission Request Form

If you have a question, concern, or recommendation

The QR Code Commission Request Form is a new, centralized communication tool designed to provide Board and Commission members with a clear, formal, and transparent method for submitting questions, concerns, and requests to VACCC leadership. This process ensures timely review, documented responses, and consistent follow-through.

Key Points

- **Creates a formal and centralized request channel** for Commissioners and Board members, replacing informal or fragmented communication with a consistent, documented process.
- **Automatically alerts VACCC leadership**, allowing requests to be triaged, assigned, and addressed efficiently and professionally.
- **Promotes transparency and accountability** by tracking each request, response, and outcome, ensuring all submissions are acknowledged and resolved.
- **Supports quarterly reporting and oversight**, with VACCC providing a summary of requests received and actions taken to demonstrate responsiveness and engagement.



FY25 Q4 Accomplishments

Direct Outreach Initiative:

- Launched April 7, 2025
- Events at churches, VFWs, elected officials' offices, and community spaces
- Sites selected using district-level Veteran density and underutilization data

Q4 Engagement Metrics (since program began):

- Events Attended: **30** (non-reoccurring office hours)
- Office Hour Visits: **37**
- Total Outreach Events: **67**
- Total Assisted (intake form submissions since start of program): **482**

Total Interaction of Veterans: 1,035

This includes all Veterans who attended each event

Q3 Engagement Metrics (Comparison):

- Events Attended: **29** (non-reoccurring office hours)
- Office Hour Visits: **32**
- Total Outreach Events: **61**
- Total Assisted (intake form submissions since start of program): **348**

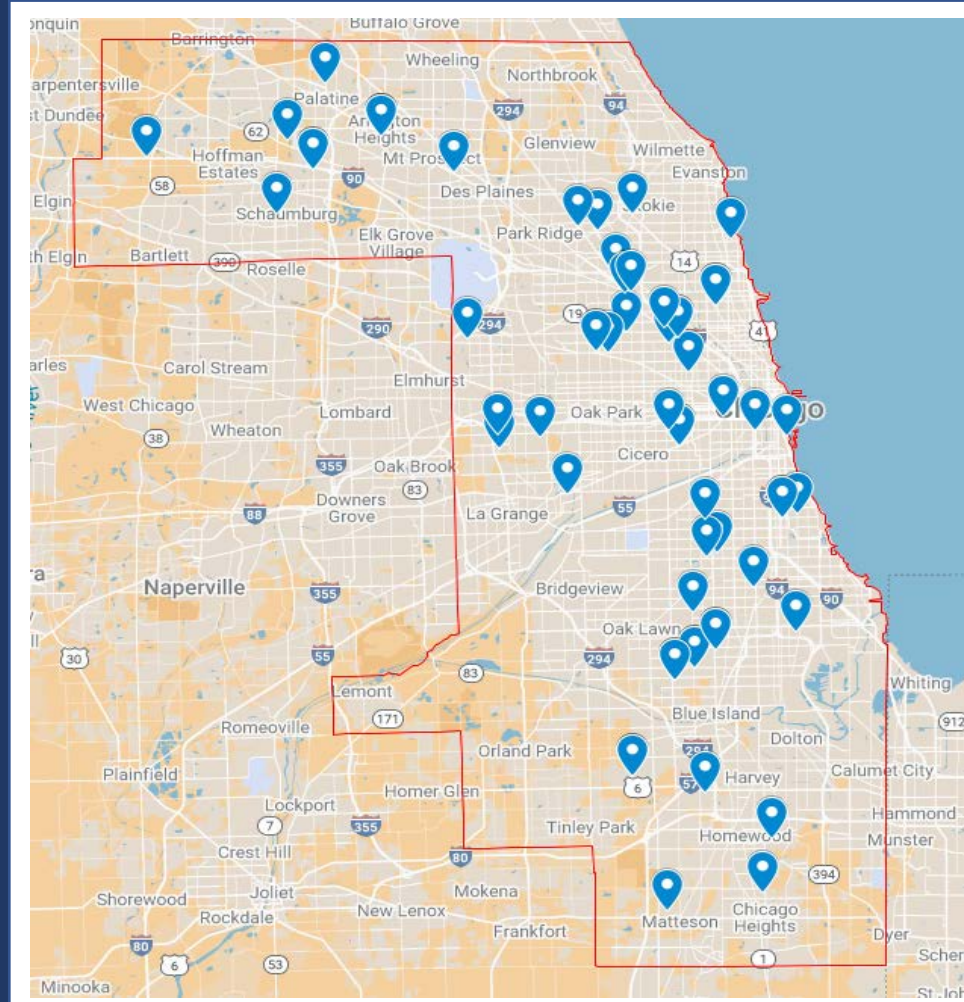
Total Interaction of Veterans: 809

This includes all Veterans who attended each event

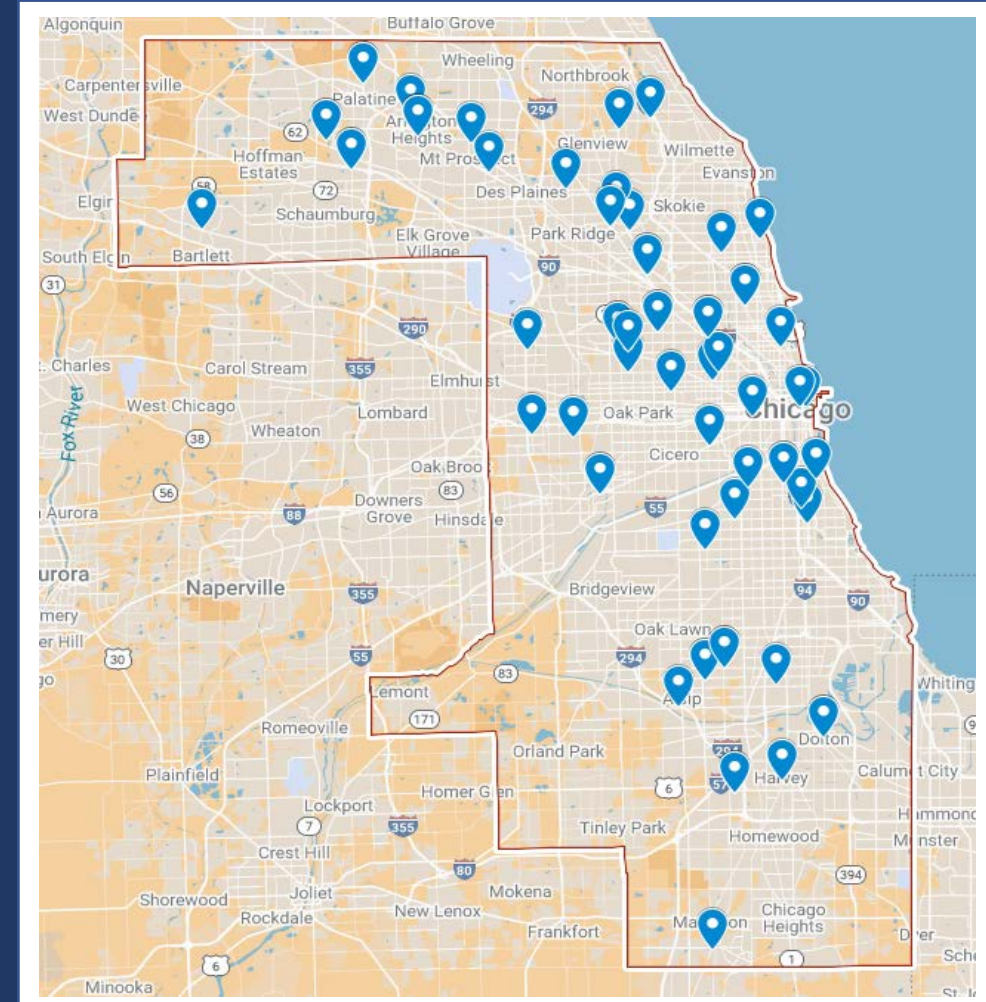


FY25 Q3 and Q4 Comparison

Q3 Event Distribution (61 Events)



Q4 Event Distribution (67 Events)





FY25 Q3 Event Listings

COUNT	DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
1	9/2/2025	Alderman Villegas (Office Hours)	6934 W Diversey Ave, Elmwood Park, IL 60707
2	9/3/2025	Office Hours, Commissioner Maggie Trevor (9th)	220 W Campbell St, Arlington Heights, IL 60005
3	9/3/2025	45th Ward office hours	5460 N. Milwaukee, Chicago, IL 60630
4	9/4/2025	2025 City of Chicago Procurement Symposium	1900 W Jackson Blvd, Chicago, IL 60612
5	9/4/2025	Commissioner Kevin Morrison, Office Hours	1325 Wiley Rd, Schaumburg, IL 60173-4310
6	9/8/2025	Worth Township Vet Presentation - Vet-talk	11601 S Pulaski Rd, Alsip, IL 60803
7	9/9/2025	Niles VFW Post 3579	7255 N. Caldwell Ave., Niles, Illinois 60714
8	9/9/2025	Alderman Lopez (Office Hours)	2650 West 51st Street Chicago, IL 60632
9	9/9/2025	Commissioner Dr. McCaskill District Office Hours	15441 Turlington Ave, Harvey, IL 60426
10	9/10/2025	Harper College	1200 W Algonquin Rd, Palatine, IL 60067
11	9/10/2025	Commissioner Miller's (Office Hours)	14037 Lincoln Ave, Dolton, IL 60419
12	9/10/2025	Commissioner Tara Stamps Office Hours	6614 W. North Ave. Chicago, IL 60656



FY25 Q3 Event Listings

COUNT	DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
13	9/12/2025	Office Hours, Commissioner SCOTT R. BRITTON	1812 Waukegan Road, Glenview IL 60025
14	9/12/2025	Alderman Matt Martin (Office Hours)	4243 N Lincoln Ave, Chicago, IL 60618
15	9/13/2025	2025 VFW Post 311 Resource Fair	22341 Governors Highway, Richton Park, IL 60471
16	9/13/2025	New Life Covenant Church, Veterans Resource Fair 2025	3400 W Division St, Chicago, IL 60651
17	9/15/2025	Alderman Anthony Napolitano, 41st Ward Office Hours	7442 N Harlem Ave, Chicago, IL 60631
18	9/16/2025	ECC Resource Event	5000 S 5th Ave, Hines, IL 60141
19	9/16/2025	Commissioner Jessica Vasquez Office (Office Hours)	2934 N. Milwaukee Ave. Unit C Chicago , IL 60618
20	9/17/2025	Commissioner Dr. Kisha E. McCaskill (Office Hours)	3039B West 159th Street Markham, Illinois 60428
21	9/17/2025	State Representative Nabeela Syed Office Hours	700 N North Ct, Palatine, IL 60067
22	9/23/2025	Commissioner Frank Aguilar Office Hours	7833 Ogden Ave. Lyons, IL 60534
23	9/24/2025	Alderman Matt O'Shea Office Hours	3207 W. 111th St. Chicago, IL, 60655
24	9/24/2025	Alderwoman Maria Hadden, Office Hours	1447 W Morse Ave, Chicago, IL 60626



FY25 Q3 Event Listings

COUNT	DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
25	9/26/2025	Alderman Nicole T. Lee (Office Hours)	3659 S. Halsted St. Chicago, IL 60609
26	9/26/2025	Salvation Army Kroc Center HPACT Medical Mobile Unit (MMU) Event	1250 W 119th St, Chicago, IL 60643
27	9/30/2025	VA Housing Education Seminar (Commissioner Alma Anaya)	3843 W 63rd St, Chicago, IL 60629
28	10/7/2025	Alderman Villegas - 36th ward Office Hours	6560 W Fullerton Ave, Chicago, IL 60707
29	10/15/2025	SALUTE TO OUR ARMED FORCES Resource Event	5000 West 127th Street, Alsip, IL 60803
30	10/18/2025	Cosmopolitan Church Vet Talk	5249 S Wabash Ave, Chicago, IL 60615
31	10/29/2025	VA Housing Education Seminar (Commissioner Morrison)	401 Irving Park Rd, Streamwood, IL 60107
32	11/1/2025	VA Housing Education Seminar (Commissioner Maggie Trevor)	601 N Main St, Mount Prospect, IL 60056
33	11/4/2025	Alderman Timmy Knudsen (Office Hours)	2523 N. Halsted Street Chicago, IL 60614
34	11/5/2025	Alderman James M. Gardiner (Office Hours)	5460 N. Milwaukee, Chicago, IL 60630
35	11/5/2025	Office Hours, Commissioner Maggie Trevor (9th)	220 W Campbell St, Arlington Heights, IL 60005
36	11/6/2025	Alderwoman Debra Silverstein (Office Hours)	2949 W Devon Ave, Chicago, IL 60659



FY25 Q3 Event Listings

COUNT	DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
37	11/6/2025	Commissioner Kevin Morrison, Office Hours	1325 Wiley Rd, Schaumburg, IL 60173
38	11/7/2025	Maine Township Veterans Breakfast	1700 Ballard Rd, Park Ridge, IL 60068
39	11/7/2025	Cook County Commissioner Alma E. Anaya & U.S. Representative Jesús “Chuy” García Resource Event	2210 W Pershing Rd, Chicago, IL 60609
40	11/7/2025	Veterans Celebration at the Niles-Maine District Library	6960 W Oakton St, Niles, IL 60714
41	11/7/2025	Metra Veterans Luncheon	147 W 47th St, Chicago, IL 60609
42	11/8/2025	Leyden Township Resource Faire	2601 N Mannheim Rd. Franklin Park IL 60131
43	11/8/2025	Luthar Village Veteran Breakfast	1250 N Village Dr, Arlington Heights, IL 60004
44	11/10/2025	Worth Township Outreach	11601 S Pulaski Rd, Alsip, IL 60803
45	11/10/2025	Chicago Cultural Center – Renaissance Court Senior Center (Alderman Conway)	78 E Washington St, Chicago, IL 60602
46	11/11/2025	Veterans Day Bagel Breakfast	161 Northfield Rd, Northfield, IL 60093
47	11/12/2025	Harper College Office Hours	1200 W Algonquin Rd, Palatine, IL 60067
48	11/12/2025	Commissioner Michael Scott, Jr. (Office Hours)	3600 West Ogden Ave, Chicago, IL 60623



FY25 Q3 Event Listings

COUNT	DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
49	11/12/2025	Commissioner Tara Stamps Office Hours	6614 W. North Ave. Chicago, IL 60656
50	11/13/2025	Commissioner Miller's (Office Hours)	14037 Lincoln Ave, Dolton, IL 60419
51	11/13/2025	Alderman Matt Martin (Office Hours)	4243 N Lincoln Ave, Chicago, IL 60618
52	11/14/2025	VA 2025 Chicago Winter Standdown	1551 N Kedzie Ave, Chicago, IL 60651
53	11/15/2025	Stand Up Veteran's Day Event	4941 W. Chicago Ave, Chicago IL 60651
54	11/17/2025	Alderman Villegas (Office Hours)	6934 W Diversey Ave, Elmwood Park, IL 60707
55	11/18/2025 - 11/20/2025	CCAO Homeowner Resource Fair	118 N Clark St, Chicago, IL 60602
56	11/18/2025	Frisbee Senior Center	52 E Northwest Hwy, Des Plaines, IL 60016
57	11/18/2025	Alderman Anthony Napolitano, 41st Ward	7442 N Harlem Ave, Chicago, IL 60631
58	11/18/2025	Commissioner Jessica Vasquez Office (Office Hours)	2934 N. Milwaukee Ave. Unit C Chicago , IL 60618
59	11/19/2025	Commissioner Dr. Kisha McCaskill Office Hours	3039B West 159th Street Markham, IL 60428
60	11/20/2025	Westchester Township	10300 W Roosevelt Rd, Westchester, IL 60154



FY25 Q3 Event Listings

COUNT	DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
61	11/20/2025	Alderman Ruth Cruz (Office Hours)	5418 W Belmont Ave, Chicago, IL 60641
62	11/20/2025	Government Access Fair	5418 W Belmont Ave, Chicago, IL 60641
63	11/21/2025	Alderman Nicole T. Lee (Office Hours)	700 N North Ct, Palatine, IL 60067
64	11/24/2025	Alderman Lamont Robinson, 4th Ward	3659 S. Halsted St. Chicago, IL 60609
65	11/25/2025	Veterans New Beginnings Resource Brief	435 E 35th St, Chicago, IL 60616
66	11/25/2025	Commissioner Frank Aguilar Office Hours	7833 Ogden Ave. Lyons, IL 60534
67	11/26/2025	Alderman Matthew O'Shea - office hours	3207 W. 111th St. Chicago, IL, 60655



FY26 Looking a Year Ahead

Streamlined with Everything you Need

Department Updates

- As our outreach model continues to evolve, any updates regarding staff reorganization, position alignment, or refinements to the outreach plan configuration will be communicated clearly as they are finalized. These adjustments are intended to better align our internal structure with operational needs, maximize limited staffing capacity, and strengthen overall service delivery. Additional briefings will be provided to ensure transparency, continuity, and alignment.

- Use a full year of outreach data to refine targeting, identify service gaps, and improve geographic coverage.
- Strengthen systems and processes to improve efficiency and reduce staff workload.
- Continue expanding key service pillars: VetConnect, VetTalks, resource navigation, and referral services.
- Maximize staffing capacity by creating scalable, repeatable systems and digital service pathways.
- Increase focus on digital products, automated tools, and online access points for Veterans.
- Expand marketing materials and standardized outreach collateral to improve visibility and consistency.
- Leverage partner organizations to amplify VACCC services and extend reach into local communities.

Local community

Local government

Local Veterans

**Working together to serve
those who served us**