

MONTHLY MUSTER

SEPTEMBER 2025

QUARTERLY MEETING

former Interim Superintendent of the VACCC, with a commendation for his dedicated leadership and service during his tenure. Mr. Steciw guided the Commission through an important period of transition and growth, leaving a lasting impact on both the organization and the Veterans we serve. His leadership not only strengthened the capabilities of the VACCC, but also inspired many - including our current Superintendent, Elizabeth Soto, who worked under him during his tenure. Thank you John for your efforts all these years, we were honored by your presence.

In September, the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County held its quarterly meeting, bringing together our board, staff, and commission members to review the progress of the VACCC and discuss the direction ahead. The meeting not only offered an opportunity to share updates, but also to celebrate key milestones.

We proudly welcomed **Justyna Berry** as our new Veteran Services Manager, who was formally sworn in during the ceremony. Her leadership marks an exciting new chapter as the VACCC continues to grow its outreach and expand support for Veterans and their families across Cook County. The Commission was also honored to recognize **John Steciw**,



A NOTE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT



ELIZABETH D. SOTO SUPERINTENDENT

At the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County (VACCC), our responsibility is to ensure Veterans and their families across Cook County continue to receive the essential services, resources, and advocacy they have earned. I have the privilege of leading this mission alongside our Deputy Superintendent and a remarkable staff that is the driving force behind the positive impact we are making every day.

RE-CAP August 2025 – Setting a New Benchmark

In August, the VACCC reached an important milestone by providing **\$93,844.32 in direct financial assistance** to Veterans in Cook County. This marked the largest monthly total in our agency's history at that time and underscored the growing need for our services.

- Veterans In-Office Visits: **385**
- Calls Handled: **416**
- Outreach Events: **33**
- New Veterans Engaged: **83**

September 2025 – Raising the Bar Again

Just one month later, we surpassed that record. In September, the VACCC provided **\$98,600.85 in direct financial assistance**, a new all-time high. This achievement demonstrates both the increased demand among Veterans and our agency's ability to respond effectively and compassionately.

- Veterans In-Office Visits: **396**
- Calls Handled: **501**
- Outreach Events: **27**
- New Veterans Engaged: **86**

Looking Toward the Future

Our focus moving forward is to continue building on these successes. Every claim filed, every emergency resolved, and every connection made in the community contributes to our mission of strengthening the lives of Veterans and their families. We are committed to exploring new opportunities, expanding partnerships, and finding innovative ways to serve those who have served our country.

The VACCC is making history together with our Veterans—empowering individuals, supporting families, and enhancing communities across Cook County, one step at a time.

VSO Monthly Report Newsletter – September 2025

Veteran Service Officer (VSO) Claims & Appeals Activity

September was another strong month for our VSO team, showing steady growth in claims activity and continued dedication to ensuring Veterans receive the benefits they've earned.

Month-to-Month Growth

When compared to August 2025 (69 claims submitted), September saw:

- An overall increase of 7 claims (+10.1%)
- Significant growth in Power of Attorney (+36%)
- Steady increases in New Claims (+10%) and Appeals (+11%)

What This Means for Veterans

Every form submitted represents a Veteran taking a step toward accessing earned benefits. The rise in Power of Attorney forms demonstrates growing trust in our representation, while the consistent increases in Intent to File, New Claims, and Appeals show that Veterans are moving forward with confidence in securing their earned benefits.

Moving Forward

Our focus for the next quarter will include:

- Expanding outreach efforts to ensure underserved Veterans are informed about their rights.
- Continuing to track claim types and outcomes to identify areas where Veterans need the most support.
- Strengthening partnerships with community organizations to ensure Veterans and their families have access to comprehensive benefits assistance.

Form/Action	Total Submitted (September 2025)
Power of Attorney (VA Form 21-22)	90
Intent to File (VA Form 21-0966)	59
New Claims (VA Form 21-526EZ)	45
Appeals/Decision Reviews	31
Total Claims Submitted	76

Veteran Resource Highlight

We encourage all Veterans and their families to review the official VA publication: 2025 Federal Benefits for Veterans, Dependents, and Survivors. This guide provides detailed information about benefits, eligibility, and resources available. [Link: 2025 VA Federal Benefits Guide](#)



**Together, we're making a
measurable impact in the lives of
Veterans across our community.**

VACCC



Veterans Assistance Commission
Cook County

2025 VFW POST 311 RESOURCE FAIR

The VACCC was proud to join the VFW Post 311 Resource Fair, hosted at VFW Post 311. This vibrant community event brought together a wide range of Veteran service providers from across Cook County to connect directly with the Veterans of the post and the surrounding neighborhood.

Organizations including the Chicago Vet Center, Cook County Health, Hines VA, and many others came out to share resources, answer questions, and provide hands-on support.

Beyond the wealth of information and services available, the fair also incorporated unique experiences such as a community blood draw and even horseback riding, creating a welcoming and memorable day for attendees.

Representing the VACCC, Outreach Coordinator **Julian Calderon** was on-site engaging with Veterans, providing resources, and ensuring our community knew about the full range of benefits and support available to them. Events like this highlight the power of collaboration and show just how much we can accomplish when organizations come together in service of our Veterans.





The VACCC was excited to attend the Chicago Procurement Symposium, hosted by the Department of Procurement Services at Malcolm X College. This dynamic annual event brought together city organizations, businesses, and community partners for a day of collaboration, resource-sharing, and opportunity-building.

Attendees gained valuable insights into the City's procurement processes, learned how to petition contracts, and connected directly with agencies and independent businesses shaping Chicago's future. Representing the VACCC, our Communications and Outreach Manager **Conner Intress** actively networked on behalf of Veterans, ensuring their voices – and those of Veteran-owned organizations – were front and center in these important conversations.

Participation in events like this strengthens our partnerships, expands access, and opens new doors for Veterans to benefit from the City's contracting and procurement opportunities. It was an exciting step forward in making sure those who served continue to have a seat at the table.

2025 CITY OF CHICAGO PROCUREMENT SYMPOSIUM

The Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County was proud to partner with Commissioner Alma Anaya, Congressman Jesús “Chuy” García, and State Representative Mike Porfirio to bring Veterans and their families an impactful VA Housing Education Seminar.

With David Piatek leading the presentation through the VA Housing Education Program, and support from both the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs and the Cook County Assessor’s Office, attendees received vital information on VA home loans, property tax benefits, and more.

This event was a resounding success, connecting Veterans to resources, answering important questions, and building stronger community ties. We are excited to continue bringing these kinds of opportunities to Veterans across Cook County so they can become more financially stable and embed themselves more firmly in our communities.



VA Housing Education Seminar with Commissioner Alma Anaya

VACCC



Veterans Assistance Commission
Cook County



VETERANS FIELD GUIDE TO GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN



The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) estimates 97 percent of VA employees continue to work during a shutdown, according to the VA Human Capital Contingency Plan. VA is committed to provide quality, consistent care and services to Veterans, families, Caregivers, and Survivors. VA's mission allows no exception to this standard even when operations are limited by the absence of appropriations (commonly known as a "Government shutdown").



SERVICES TO VETERANS NOT IMPACTED:



VA Medical Centers, Outpatient Clinics, and Vet Centers will be open as usual and providing all services.



VA benefits will continue to be processed and delivered, including compensation, pension, education, and housing benefits.



Burials will continue at VA national cemeteries. Applications for headstones, markers, and burial benefits processing will continue.



The Board of Veterans' Appeals will continue decisions on Veterans' cases.



Call Centers: VA's primary call center (1-800-MyVA411) and the Veterans Crisis Line (Dial 988, Press 1) will remain open 24/7. The VA Benefit Hotline (1-800-827-1000) will be available Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. ET.



Suicide prevention programs, homelessness services, and caregiver support will continue.



HAVE A QUESTION? CALL US!

The one number all Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors can use to access VA resources 24 hours-a-day, 365 days-a-year.

1-800-MYVA411 (1-800-698-2411)



SERVICES TO VETERANS IMPACTED:



VA will cease providing transition program assistance and career counseling.



Call Centers: VA's GI Bill (1-888-GIBILL-1) and National Cemetery Applicant Assistance (1-800-697-6947) hotlines will be closed.



VA benefits regional offices will be closed.



Public Affairs and outreach to Veterans will cease, including social media, VetResources emails, and responses to press inquiries.



No grounds maintenance or placement of permanent headstones at VA cemeteries.

Applications for pre-need burial at VA cemeteries will not be processed.

No printing of new Presidential Memorial Certificates.



No outreach to state, county, tribal, municipal, faith-based, and community-based partners by VA Central Office.

In the event of a prolonged shutdown, VA will continue to review and update its plan in conjunction with the applicable legal requirements and circumstances. Please visit www.whitehouse.gov/omb/ or www.VA.gov for updated information.

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Download the VA Welcome Kit www.va.gov/welcome-kit/

Subscribe to #VetResources www.va.gov/vetresources/

Veterans Crisis Line: Dial 988, then Press 1

Call 1-800-MyVA411 (1-800-698-2411) or visit <https://www.va.gov/contact-us/>

VACCC



Veterans Affairs Community Care System
VA Medical Centers

Contact Us



Scan now to follow
us on our Social
Media



Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center

1100 S. Hamilton Ave, C-011

(LL)Chicago , IL 60612

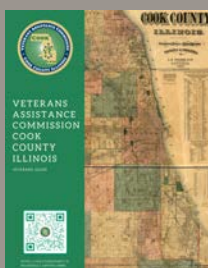
(312) 433-6010

VACCC@cookcountyil.gov



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

<https://hovqr.to/de421623>



For a Digital Copy of our
Veterans Resources
Guide please scan

