

Veteran Services

2023 Annual Report

Mission: To advocate with purpose and passion for Eau Claire County Veterans and link them to superior services, benefits, and support.

Vision: Recognized at the premier point of entry for Eau Claire County Veterans to access earned services, benefits, and support.

Our Strategic Priorities:

Customer Service. We are driven by customer feedback, Veteran data, and employees characterized by a customer-centric mindset to make accessing ECC services seamless, effective, efficient, and emotionally resonant for our Veterans.

Provision of Services. Continue partnerships with local Veteran service organizations, community agencies, and Federal and state agencies to better assist Veterans. Maintain flexible hours to meet the needs of our Veterans allowing them access to information and assistance.

Communication. Expand awareness of programs, and benefits utilizing marketing, social media, and customer feedback.

Department Staff: Veteran Services Director – Eric Killen, Veteran Service Officer – Adam Kohls, Administrative Specialist – Beth Risen, Veteran Benefits Specialist – Angela Deutschlander

Core Services: Disability compensation, Health care, Mental Health Counseling, Veteran and survivors Pension benefits, Education Tuition and Allowances, Burial benefits, Assisted living / Long-term care, Transportation to Mlps VA Medical, Property tax benefits, WI GI Bill, WI Veterans Homes / Cemeteries, Vets Housing Reintegration Program, Obtaining military records / awards, Assistance with Housing and Homelessness, State subsistence grants, Driver's license identifier, Park passes, Other...

2023 Accomplishments

- 1,590 Office Appointments from Veterans and families (25% increase from 2022).
- 480 claims submitted to VA for benefits (24% increase)
- 4,137 phone calls with Veterans and agencies (19% increase).
- 2,452 emails with Veterans and agencies (27% increase).
- 84 Veterans transported to the Minneapolis VA Medical Center with the support of volunteer drivers and a van funded by the Disable American Veterans (DAV) (5% decrease)
- 32 grants awarded to veterans (gas/food cards) (6% increase).
- 160 hours of professional certification training.
- Awarded \$14.3K grant from WI Dept. of Veterans Affairs.
- 724 people like and follow us on Facebook.
- 64 social media postings / articles.
- Represents the county interests / investments of \$450K as a member of the Chippewa Valley Veterans Tribute foundation.

1 - Federal, State and County Veterans' Benefits Programs

As mandated by state law each county will maintain a Veteran Service Office to provide professional guidance and assistance in obtaining federal, state and county benefits for Veterans and their families. The Veteran service staff (service officers) are certified and accredited through the US Department of Veteran Affairs. 1,700 accredited representatives throughout 36 states responsible for successfully processing nearly \$43 billion in claims annually.

Source: U.S. Dept of Veterans Affairs, National Center for Analysis and Statistics

Veteran Population and Demographics in Eau Claire County (ECC)

- ECC is home to 8,488 Veterans, roughly 8.12% of the population.
- ECC has 1,425 disabled Veterans (1,319 men, 106 women). 176 are 100% disabled.
- Vietnam Era Veterans are the largest veteran population (38% of the Veterans in ECC).
- Most Veterans in ECC are male (91%). However, women currently make up 16% of the U.S. military which points to a steady increase in the female Veteran population.
- Most Veterans (42%) are age 60 or older but the overall age is trending younger.
- 54% of ECC Veterans served in the U.S. Army.
- About half of all Veterans served in a combat zone.
- About 20% of Veterans are military retirees (20 or more years of service)
- About half of ECC veterans have used educational benefits
- About 10% of ECC Veterans are currently in school.
- Note: The military is higher educated than the public. In the military today, 99% of the people have a high school education. In the U.S. it's only 86%.
- Most Veterans (65%) in ECC are homeowners.
- Most Veterans (30%) do not participate in veteran organizations

OUTPUTS

Source: Vetra Spec Database

	2021	2022	2023
Appointments with Veterans / Family	764	1197	1590
Phone calls with Vets/agencies/etc.	3664	3386	4137
Emails with Vets/agencies/etc.	1470	1808	2452
Claims for Benefits submitted to VA	304	366	480
Transported to Mlps VA Med Center	86	88	84
Grants awarded to Vets (Gas/Food)	51	30	32
Federal Compensation Dollars (VA)	\$24.7M	unk	unk
Federal Medical Care Dollars (VA)	\$18.2M	unk	unk
Federal Education/vocational Dollars	\$2.3M	unk	unk

Performance Goals

Outcome Measures

	2021	2022	2023
Veterans are satisfied with the professional, compassionate, and timely services they receive.	96%	97%	98%
Satisfaction rate - overall experience interacting with the ECC Veteran Services Office was timely and positive. <u>Benchmark is 90% positive response rate</u> to online and in person surveys.	68 responses to survey	100 responses to survey	103 responses to survey
Service officers are nationally accredited by the VA to prepare, present, and prosecute U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) claims.	96 hrs.	160 hrs.	132 hrs.
Maintain accreditation and subject matter expertise of federal, state, and local veteran benefit programs to provide effective services. <u>Benchmark – each service officer attends a min of 40 hours professional education</u> at the state or national level each year.			

2 - Outreach, Education and Liaison Duties

Provide outreach and education to the public and the county’s Veterans and dependents to raise awareness about federal, state and county Veteran’s benefits, services and health care and Veterans’ contributions and legacy. Acts as liaison between county, state and federal programs and providers. Many Veterans do not utilize the benefits they have earned because they are unaware or unable. Out of 19 million Veterans in the United States, only about nine million are enrolled in VA health care, five million receive disability compensation, and three million are active VA home loan participants—with other VA programs showing similar rates of underutilization. *Source: National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics*

OUTPUTS		2021	2022	2023
Flags/Headstone/grave marker placed annually		8508	8600	8635
Number of community presentations		7	14	12
Number of offsite enrollment events		0	0	2
Number of social media articles/postings		54	58	64
Collaborative meetings with partner agencies		5	5	4
Performance Goal	Outcome Measures			
Expand awareness and education of Veterans’ programs, benefits, and legacy. Include women Veterans and adapt to their evolving needs. Utilize tech, including social media, off site locations, local partnerships, and historical education as the primary drivers.	Submit an article for social media posting <u>each week (52)</u> for publication and followers.	54	58	64
	Minimum of <u>monthly (12) presentation</u> to a community or veteran's organization.	594	646	724
		7	14	12
	Contribute to family well-being with new <u>U.S. flags on all Vet graves</u> annually	100%	100%	100%
	<u>Maintain a seat</u> on the CV Veterans Tribute to guide the creation of a memorial for reflection, a place that enforces the sentiment of community, and where history is preserved.	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Increase access for rural veterans with <u>offsite benefits enrollment teams</u>	N/A	N/A	Yes 2 Augusta
	<u>Quarterly</u> collaboration meetings with partner agencies	5	5	4

Alignment with Strategic Plan

Provision of Services	Communication	Customer Service
<p>According to the VA, three-quarters of the veterans’ claims submitted for VA benefits come through a county veterans service office. The CVSOs are staffed by ac-credited veteran service officers, trained to navigate a complex bureaucracy. The Veteran services office in Eau Claire County is the at-home, back-to-the-community stop for Veterans who have served the nation. We are the local link in an intergovern-mental chain serving the county’s 10,000 Veterans and family members.</p>	<p>Social media is the primary means to communicate with customers and partners. It allows us to effectively engage our customers, reach new audiences, and build authority as experts in veterans services. Currently we have 646 Facebook followers (9% increase) and over the last year posted 58 informational articles of interest to Veterans and families.</p>	<p>Listening to our Veterans plays an important role in providing exceptional customer service. Eau Claire County Veteran Services is not only listening to our customers, but we are also acting on their concerns and recommendations to improve. We listen to feedback from Veterans, their families, caregivers, and partner agencies through multiple feedback channels. These include responses to online surveys, in-person interactions, drop box comments, working with Veterans advocates, and participating in community engagement activities.</p>

2024 Goals – How Success is Measured!

Goals (based around the concept of Serve, Move, and Communicate). Each quarter we will internally evaluate our progress in achieving the following:

1. Collaborate with local and state agencies; leaders; other partners; and customers to enhance services and protections for Veterans and their families.

- Dental program in partnership with CVTC to assist Veterans in maintaining dental health.
- Lead and facilitate two collaboration meetings/summits with partner agencies and leaders. Our office can play a leading role in bringing Veterans’ service providers together to improve and expand support and outreach to all Veterans.
- Plan & facilitate a first ever Veterans Benefits Fair in collaboration with the agencies that support veterans.
- Monthly presentations with community groups to improve strategic engagement with community leaders and stakeholders regarding Veteran issues.
- Engage state legislators and communicate ECC and Veterans issues as a WCA Ambassador.

2024 Goals – How Success is Measured! Cont...

- Customer feedback surveys to ensure Veterans and their families are satisfied with the care and services they receive.

2. Bolster outreach and service delivery to rural and other underserved Veteran populations in Eau Claire County.

- Improve service delivery to underserved rural communities with offsite locations to provide benefit education and enrollment services. We will go to the rural customers a minimum of 4 times in 2023! Directly connecting Veterans to resources is more important than providing information via a website.
- Continue to post weekly on Facebook current information that is relevant and informative to Veterans.

3. Invest in our workforce and enhance operational effectiveness to maximize service to our Veterans.

- 100% Service Officer attendance at national convention (Madison, WI) to attain initial certification and continuing education requirements for maintaining certification.
- Attend the quarterly NW WI CVSO Association meetings.

4. Eau Claire County recognizes Veterans for their strengths and as valued members of our community, and regularly celebrates and honors them.

Maintain a seat on Chippewa Valley Veterans Foundation to continue building a tribute in Eau Claire county as a place for memorials and reflection, and a place where history is preserved for younger generations.