

VETERANS ASSISTANCE COMMISSION
OF
KANE COUNTY, ILLINOIS

Jacob A. Zimmerman, Superintendent



Annual Report

Fiscal Year 2024

COUNTY OF KANE
VETERANS ASSISTANCE COMMISSION

JACOB A. ZIMMERMAN
Superintendent



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State of Illinois
The Honorable JB Pritzker
207 State House
Springfield, Illinois 62706-0001

December 30, 2024

Dear Governor Pritzker,

It is with great pleasure that I present you with the annual report of the Veterans Assistance Commission of Kane County, Illinois, pursuant to Chapter 330, Part 45, Section 8 of the Illinois Compiled Statutes.

As the foremost veteran advocacy agency in Illinois' seventh most veteran populous county, we provide services in the following categories:

- 1.) Advocacy
- 2.) Benefit Application Filing and Claims Management
- 3.) Transportation to Local VA Medical Appointments
- 4.) Financial Assistance for Indigent Veterans

In Fiscal Year 2024, ending on November 30th, the Commission was instrumental in securing \$9,570,863.83 in new monetary benefits for Kane County veterans, their dependents, and their survivors from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). That represents a return to the community of \$17.97 for every dollar of property tax revenue received by the Commission. Additionally, our staff was directly responsible in securing \$1,937,005.51 in new VA health care benefits for Kane County veterans. Consequently, the Commission continues to be a significant and judicious unit of local government.

Thank you for your support of our county's veterans. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions, comments, or concerns.

Very Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Jacob A. Zimmerman'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Jacob A. Zimmerman, Superintendent

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Veterans Assistance Commission Delegates and Alternates 2024

President John R. Westphall – Saint Charles AMVETS Post 503
Vice-President Theodore N. Biever Jr. – Dundee VFW Post 2298
Secretary Diane M. Ahrens – Elgin Marine Corps League Detachment 077
Treasurer Robert A. Getz – American Legion Post 57, Elgin VFW Post 1307
Chaplain – Vacant
Executive Committee Norman E. Welker – Elburn American Legion Post 630
Executive Committee Daniel J. Palmer Jr. – Aurora AMVETS Post 103
Executive Committee Lawrence E. Orsborn – Batavia VFW Post 1197
Delegate Robert A. Getz – Elgin American Legion Post 57
Alternate Mark W. Smith – Elgin American Legion Post 57
Delegate Robert Bigelow – Geneva American Legion Post 75
Alternate Eric W. Teafoe – Geneva American Legion Post 75
Delegate Diane M. Ahrens – Elgin Marine Corps League Detachment 077
Delegate John C. Muschler – Aurora American Legion Post 84
Alternate Peter A. Regnier – Aurora American Legion Post 84
Delegate Daniel J. Palmer Jr. – Aurora AMVETS Post 103
Alternate Rob Daniele – Aurora AMVETS Post 103
Delegate Gordon F. Steinway – Elgin AMVETS Post 202
Alternate Joseph P. McKeown III – Elgin AMVETS Post 202
Delegate Dave Trumble – Maple Park American Legion Post 312
Alternate Kevin H. Kostuchowski – Maple Park American Legion Post 312
Delegate Charles Wittleder – Saint Charles American Legion Post 342
Alternate Dennis Larson – Saint Charles American Legion Post 342
Delegate John R. Westphall – Saint Charles AMVETS Post 503
Alternate Robert L. Phillips – Saint Charles AMVETS Post 503
Delegate David M. Jordan – Batavia American Legion Post 504
Alternate Nate R. Gustafson – Batavia American Legion Post 504
Delegate Norman E. Welker – Elburn American Legion Post 630
Alternate Charles F. Coffey – Elburn American Legion Post 630
Delegate Michael R. Holt – Carpentersville American Legion Post 679
Alternate Willis C. McConney – Carpentersville American Legion Post 679
Delegate T.R. Smith – Hampshire American Legion Post 680
Alternate Dale A. Dopkins – Hampshire American Legion Post 680
Delegate Stanley E. Herzog – Geneva Vietnam Veterans of American Chapter 693
Alternate William L. Troth – Geneva Vietnam Veterans of American Chapter 693
Delegate Lawrence E. Orsborn – Batavia VFW Post 1197
Alternate Sean L. Peter – Batavia VFW Post 1197
Delegate Richard R. Matthys – Fox Valley Marine Corps League Detachment 1233
Alternate Scott D. Roscoe – Fox Valley Marine Corps League Detachment 1233
Delegate Robert A. Getz – Elgin VFW Post 1307
Alternate Shirldine-Kay Nohl – Elgin VFW Post 1307
Delegate Theodore N. Biever Jr. – Dundee VFW Post 2298
Alternate John S. Darr – Dundee VFW Post 2298

Delegates and Alternates 2024, Continued

Delegate Mark F. Powell – Saint Charles VFW Post 5036

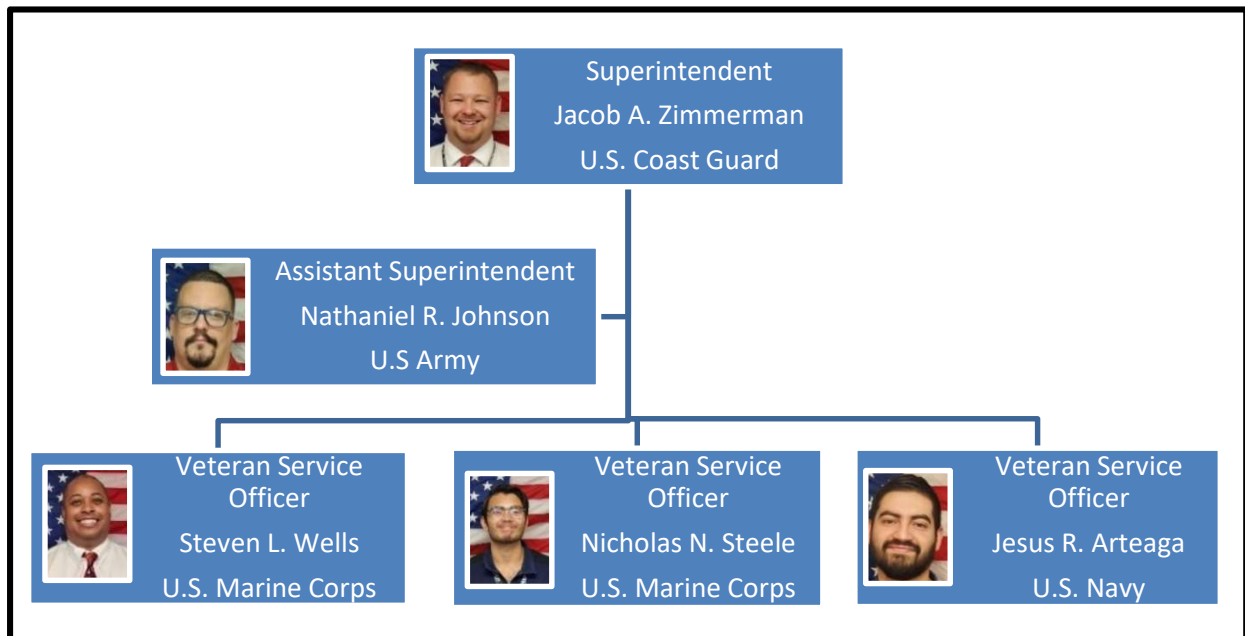
Alternate John J. Erwin – Saint Charles VFW Post 5036

Delegate Kenneth Periman – Montgomery VFW Post 7452

Our Mission

To maximize the benefits for and improve the welfare of veterans in the County of Kane by serving as the central assistance and advocacy agency for veterans residing therein.

Our Team



Something that is truly special about our Veterans Assistance Commission is our highly-trained and passionate staff. Their expertise and enthusiasm allows us to keep a lower head count than our peers thus providing an excellent level of service at an efficient cost to taxpayers. Our workload has remained at historical levels in Fiscal Year 2024, due in large part to the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act. All of our VSO's hold the advanced designation of "Certified Veteran Advocate" from the National Association of County Veteran Service Officers, with the exception of VSO Steele who must first have more than five years in his role as a VSO before attempting to become a Certified Veteran Advocate. Additionally, VSO Arteaga was awarded the prestigious Veteran Service Officer of the Year Award for 2024 by the Illinois Association of County Veterans Assistance Commissions. Commission staff have received that award in three out of the last four years – substantiating their excellent performance and training.

Veterans Benefits Assistance

The vast majority of our workload is assisting veterans in applying for benefits from the VA. This section is a summary of our work in that regard over Fiscal Year 2024. Year-after-year we have continued to set new records which is true for this year as well.

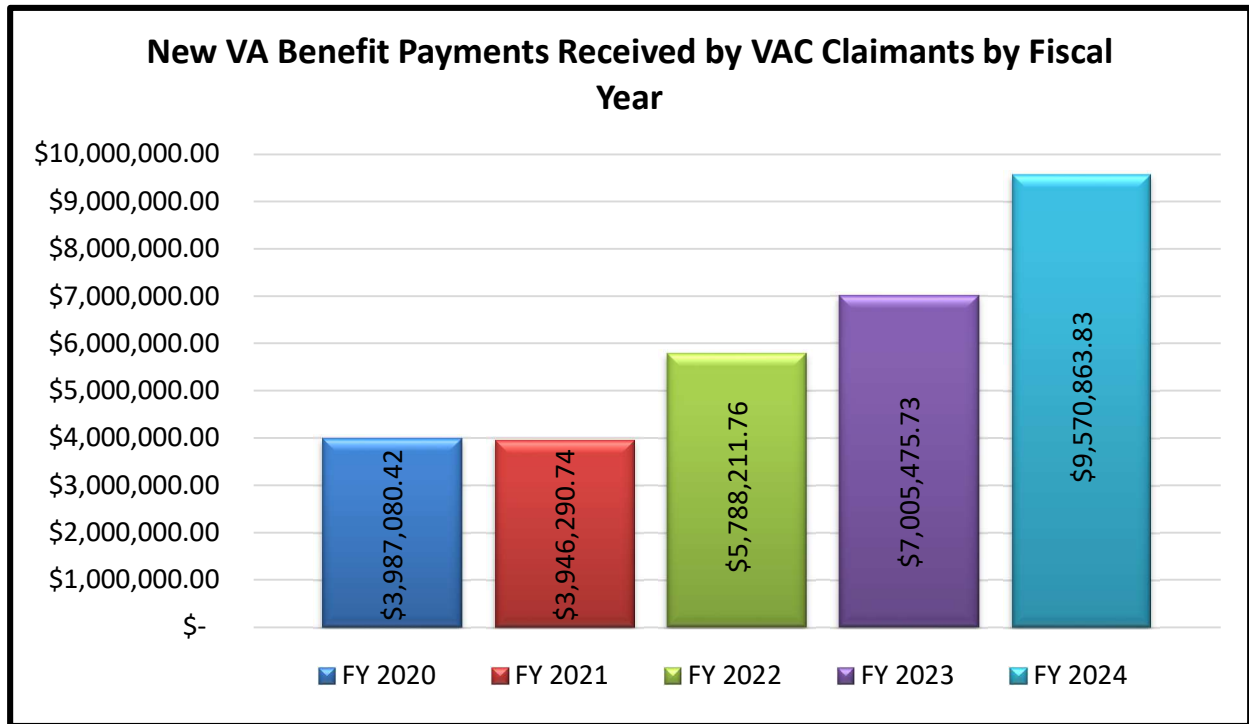


Figure 1. This chart simply shows the amount of new monetary benefits awarded to our clients by the VA per fiscal year. A large part of our success in this Fiscal Year was due to the enhanced benefits offered under the PACT Act. This is a record amount benefits secured for our clients.

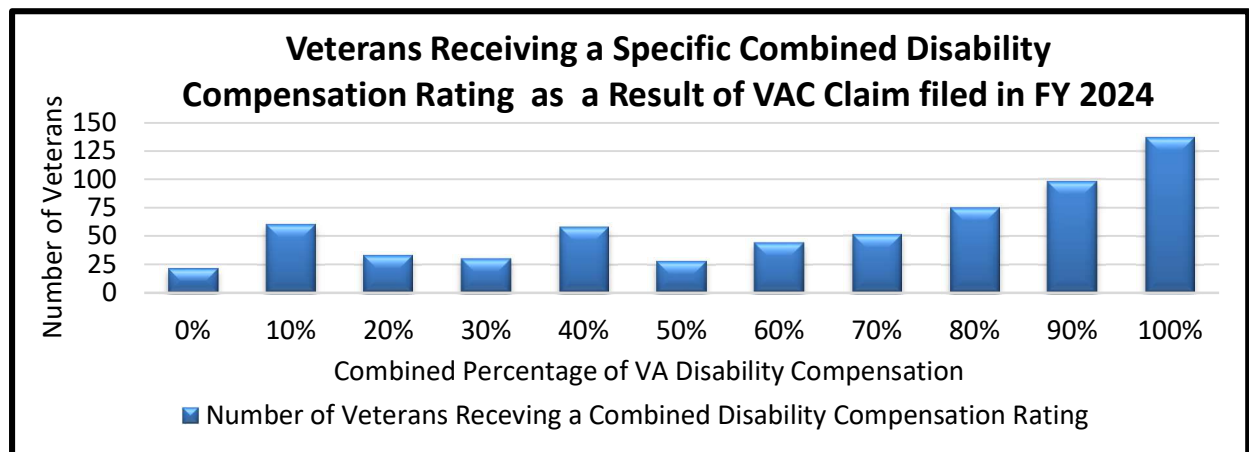


Figure 2. Depicted above is the breakdown of the combined disability compensation rating for the 708 of our clients who received a disability compensation decision in FY 2024. The mean disability compensation rating for our clients this fiscal year is 60% while the mode is 100%.

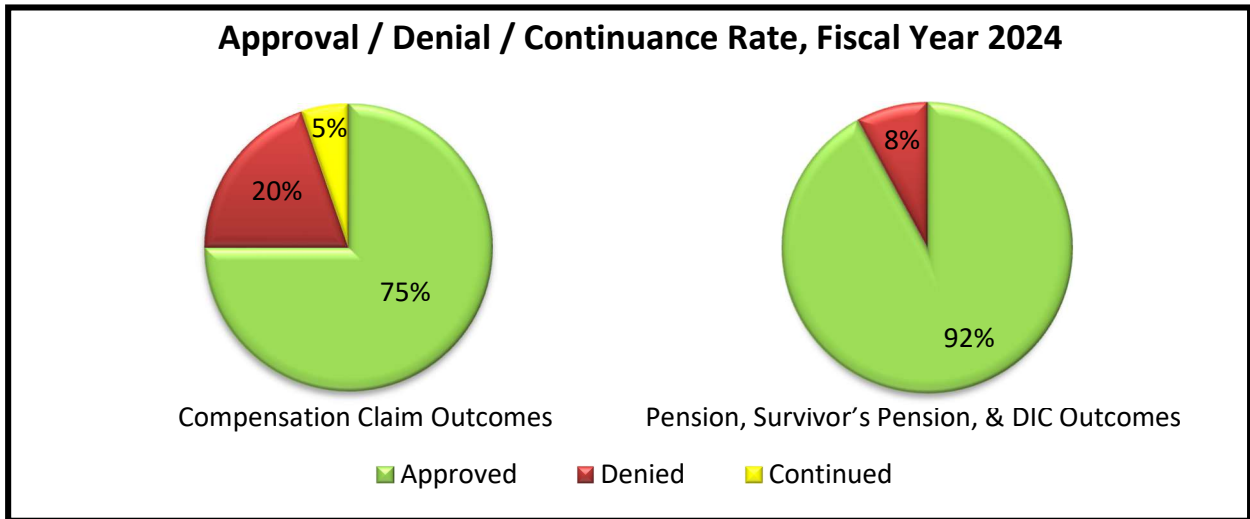


Figure 3. As depicted in this chart, a vast majority of our clients received a favorable decision on their claim. It should be noted for the purposes of this chart “approved” means at least one contention on the claim was approved, “denied” means all contentions on the claim were denied, and “continued” means there the increase being sought in the application was not approved and the client’s benefits remained the same as prior to the application.

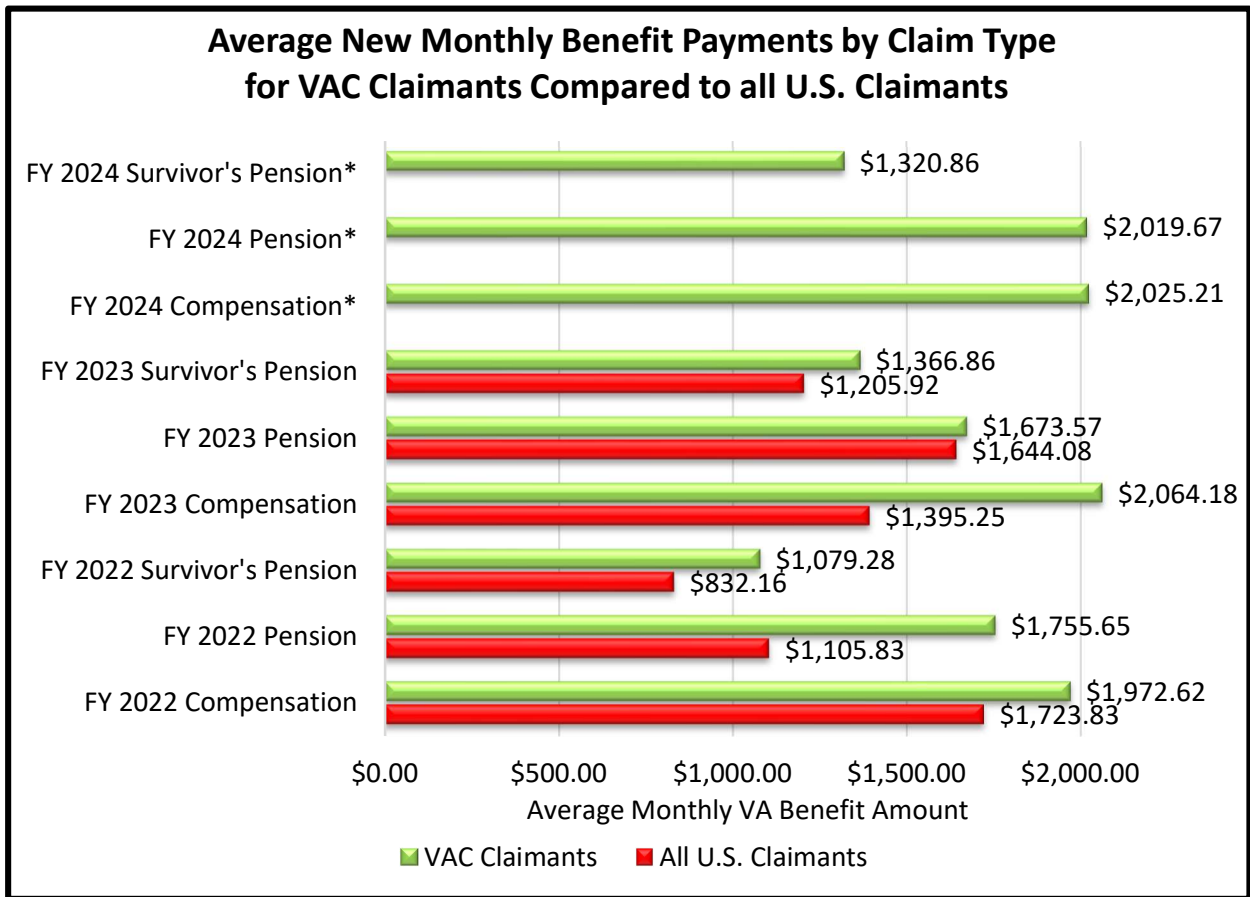


Figure 4. This chart shows that for the previous two fiscal years, claimants who filed their claim through our office received a higher monthly benefit than the average claimant did nationally. *Fiscal Year 2024 data not yet available from the VA. [1]

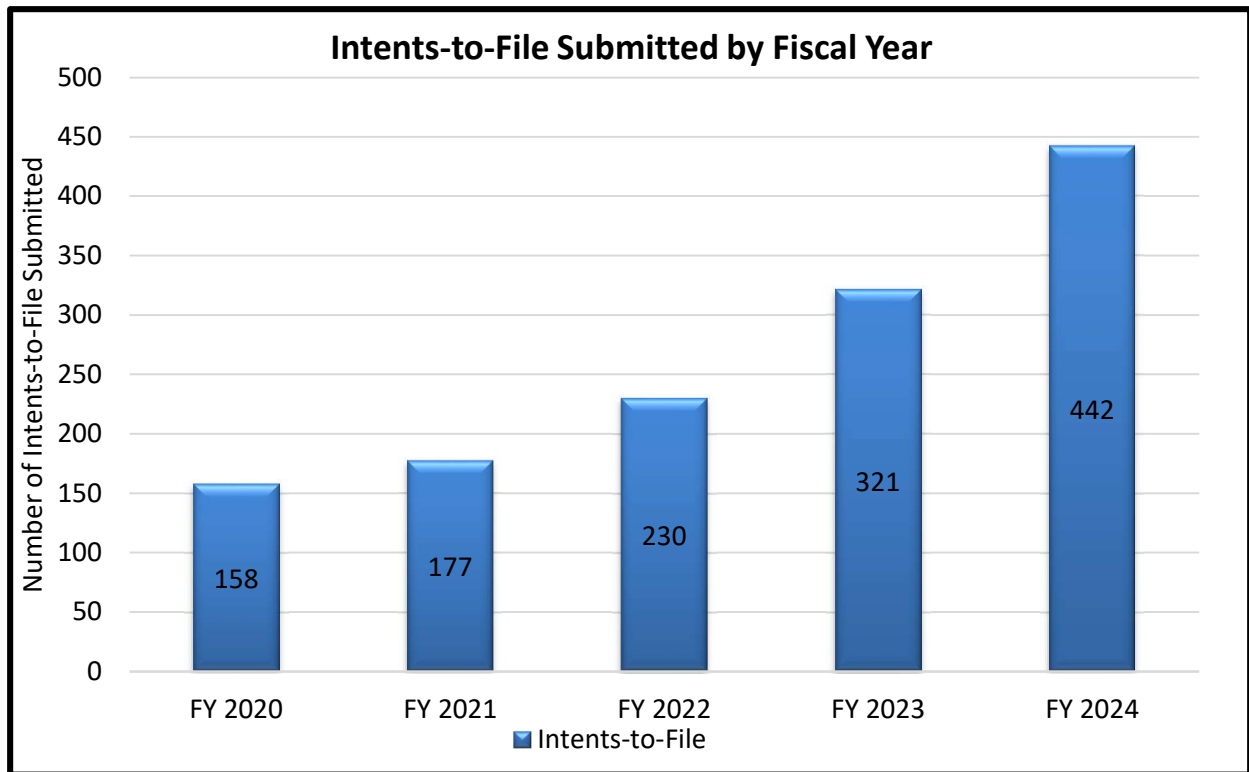


Figure 5. In Fiscal Year 2024, Commission staff completed 442 Intents-to-File, which is a record for our office. Outreach events are the prime generator of Intents-to-File as outreach events are ideal for non-comprehensive client intake. Intents-to-File are an important piece of our work as they protect our clients' effective date for benefits while allowing up to one year to gather all necessary documentation to support a claim for VA benefits. This results in larger retroactive payments to our clients when their claims are decided while allowing time for the claim to be fully-developed prior to submission.

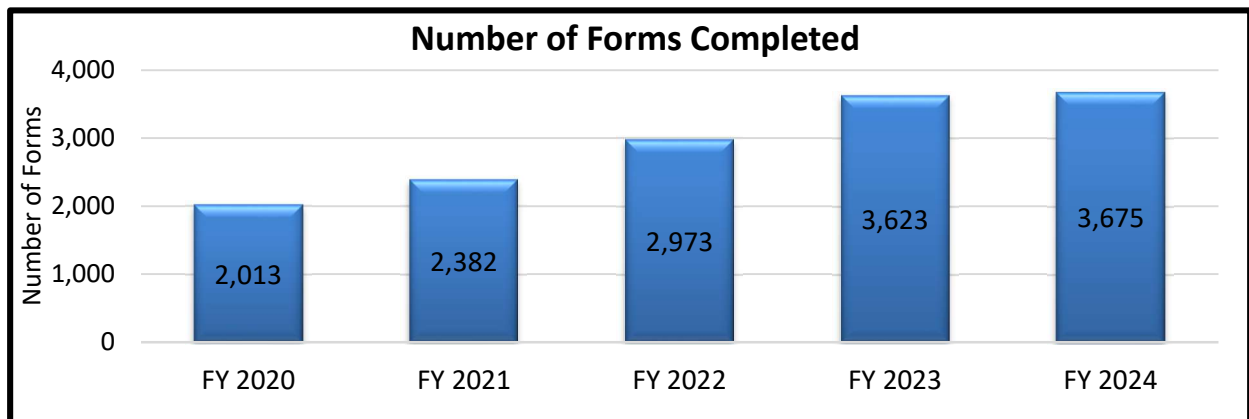


Figure 6. Another record set was the number of forms completed by staff in support of applications for veterans benefits. The number of claims filed as reported in Figure 7 can be a deceiving workload metric since a "claim filed" could be a single form or could be as many as six or more separate forms being filed for that single claim. Each claim is unique and requires different amounts of effort to prosecute and that effort is reflected in this chart.

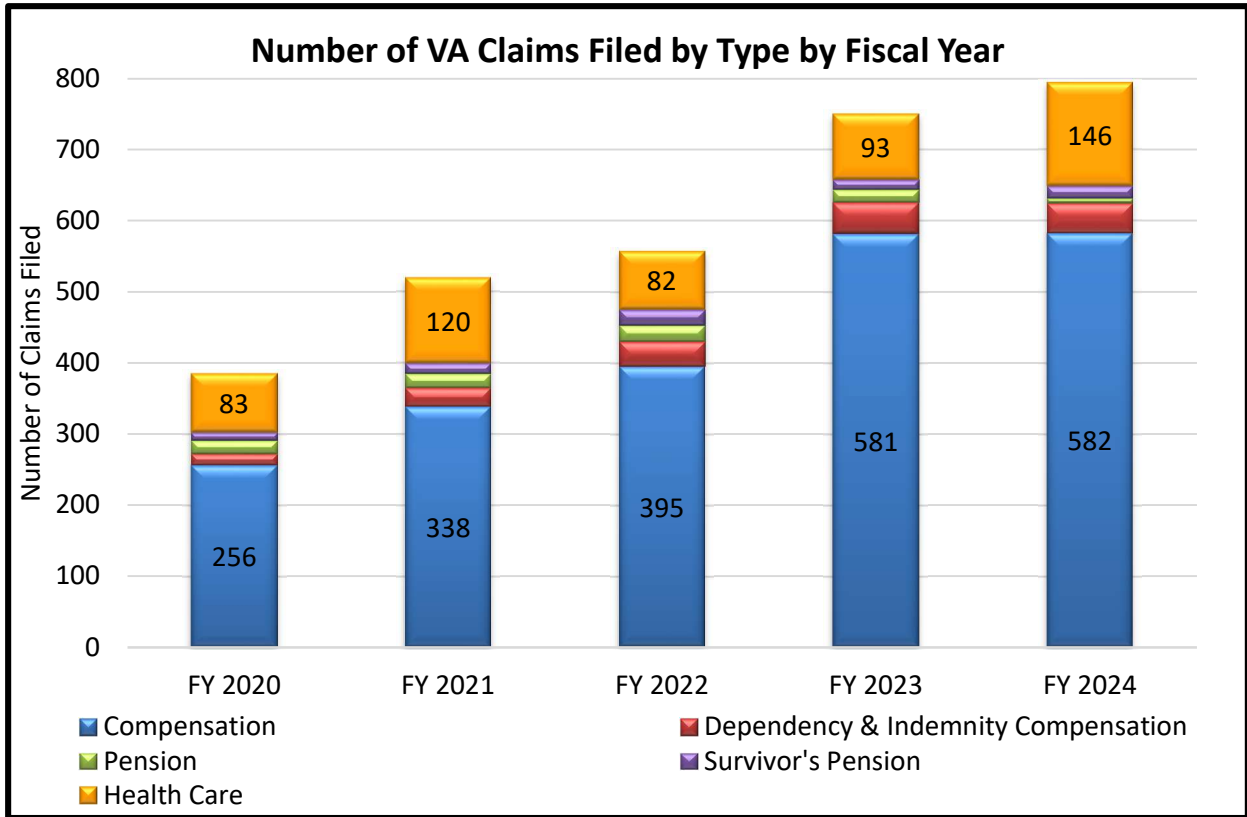


Figure 7. Commission staff completed nearly 6% more claims in Fiscal Year 2024 than in Fiscal Year 2023. This represents a record production year for our office. The work in this chart represents \$10,692,430.06 in new benefits awarded.

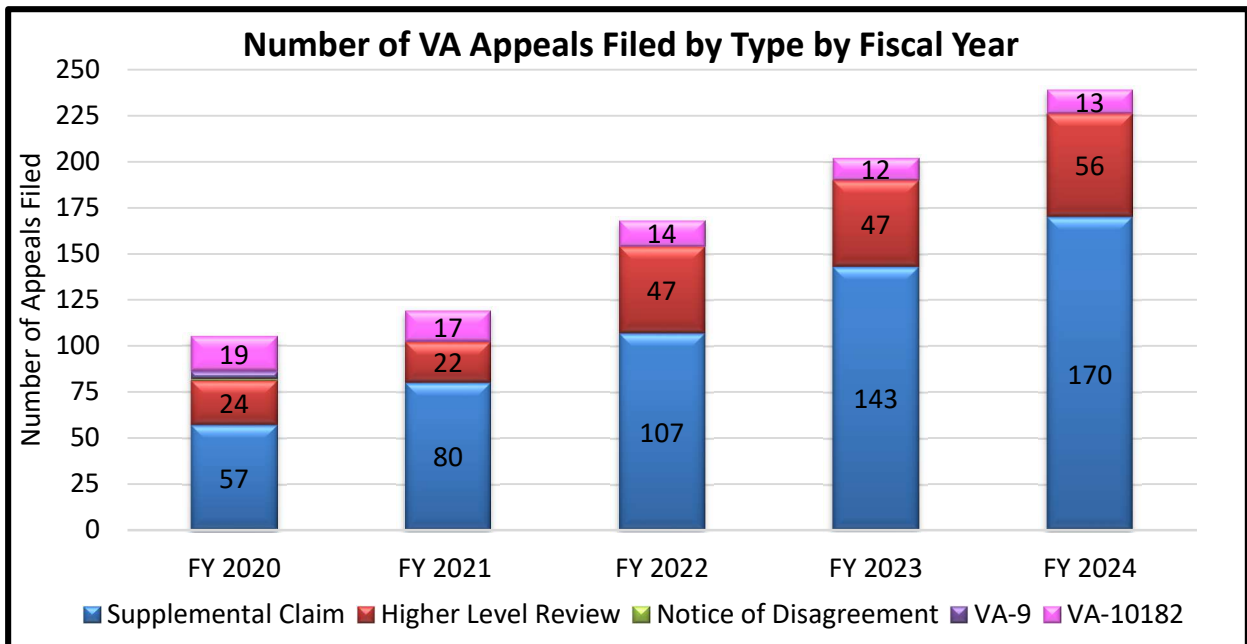


Figure 8. Commission staff completed 18% more appeals in Fiscal Year 2024 than in Fiscal Year 2023. This represents a record production year for our office in this workload category. The work in this chart represents \$815,439.28 in new benefits awarded.

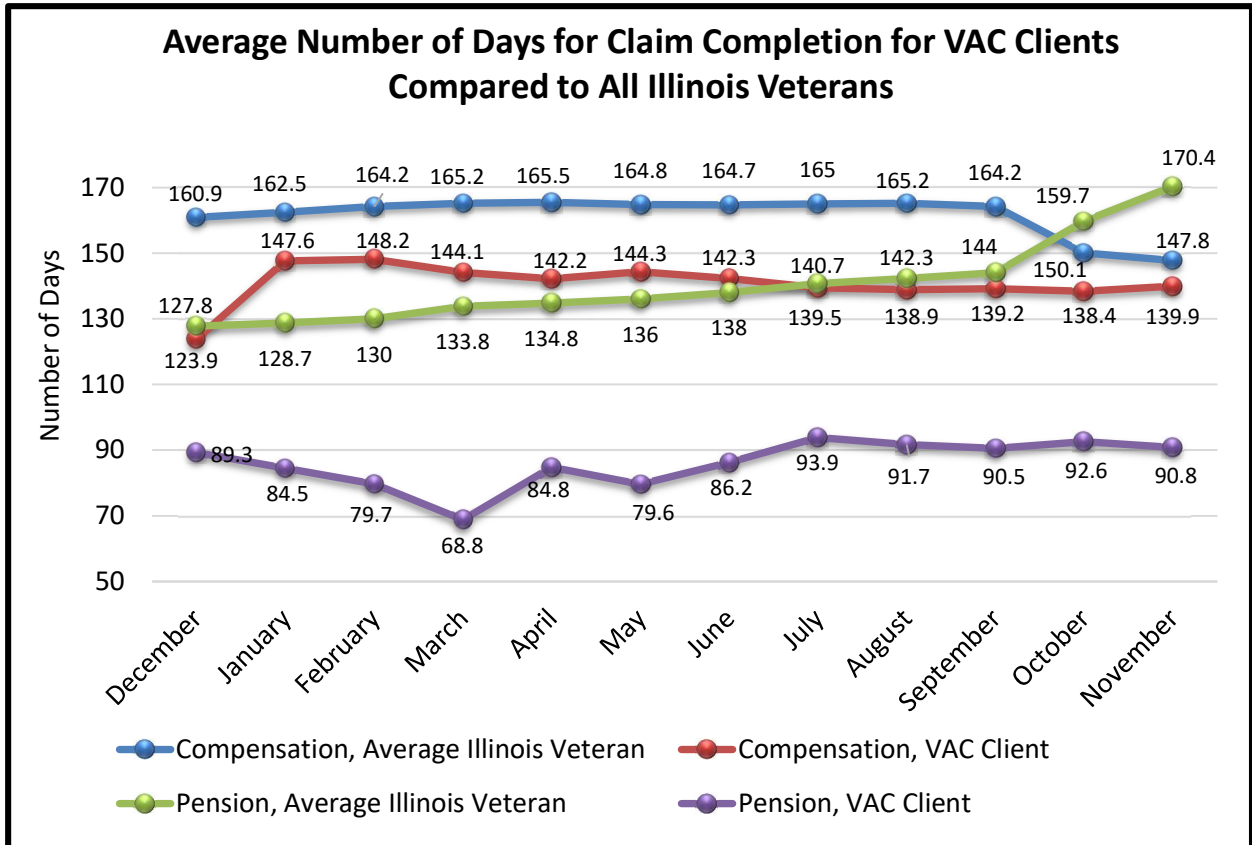


Figure 9. Commission staff pride themselves in identifying efficiencies in the VA claims process. Through continuous process improvement, proactive monitoring, and quality control; staff identify strategies ensuring claim forms are thoroughly completed and error-free. That usually promotes a faster average processing time. In a time of a record high claims inventory for both our office and the VA nationally, staff is doing a remarkable job in identifying efficiencies and leveraging those in order to obtain faster decisions on average for our clients. [2]

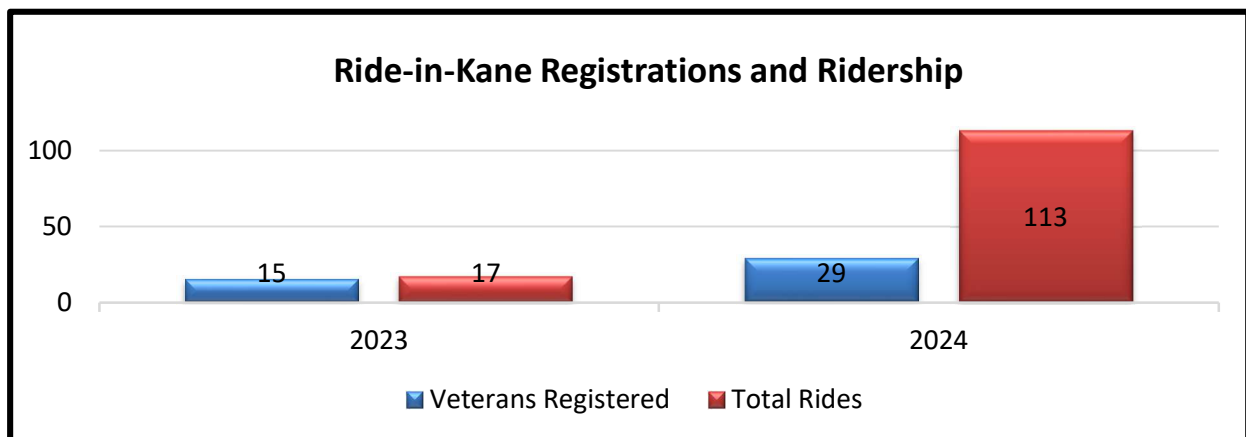


Figure 10. In the first full year since 2016 that the Commission has a transportation program, we saw ridership almost quadruple over the previous year. In this program, the Commission acts as a sponsor under Ride-in-Kane where the Commission provides registration support and PACE provides the scheduling, dispatching, and rides. This program is currently funded by the American Rescue Plan Act.

Finally, the Commission’s Veterans Assistance Program for indigent veterans remained a small, but critical, piece of the Commission’s mission. The program’s utilization has declined because our clients have obtained better federal benefits, veterans in Kane County have a significantly higher median income than the average non-veteran citizen residing here, and the proliferation of assistance programs due to the COVID-19 Pandemic that have not yet waned. However, the program serves as a vital lifeline for those veterans who have fallen on hard times and helps us triage assistance even if we are unable to provide direct assistance. This program can pay a veteran’s rent, utilities, as well as food and personal needs up to a capped amount that is dependent upon their family size. No funds are paid directly to the veteran with the exception of food and personal needs vouchers which are given to recipients and are redeemable at Aldi’s – a widely available grocery store in Kane County, which is also headquartered in Batavia, and provides vouchers which are not redeemable for alcoholic beverages. We had 13 applicants to the Veterans Assistance Program that we provided direct or indirect assistance for. In the case of an applicant whom we are unable to provide direct assistance, we do a warm hand-off referral to other organizations that can provide direct assistance.

We would be remiss if we did not recognize our partner agencies and organizations who help to ensure the continued success of veterans who call Kane County home:

- Chicago VA Regional Office
- Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital
- Aurora Vet Center
- Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery
- Fort Sheridan National Cemetery
- National Personnel Records Center
- Social Security Administration
- Small Business Administration
- Illinois Attorney General’s Office
- Illinois Secretary of State
- Illinois Department of Employment Security
- Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs
- Northern Illinois University
- Elgin Community College
- Waubensee Community College
- 16th Judicial Circuit
- Kane County Board
- Kane County Recorder’s Office
- Kane County Assessment Office
- Kane County Division of Transportation
- Kane County Coroner’s Office
- Kane County Clerk’s Office
- Kane County Court Services
- Kane County Information Technology
- Pace Suburban Bus
- Veterans Smile Program
- Operation Sweet Life
- Senior Services Associates
- Illinois Joining Forces
- Aurora Veterans Advisory Council
- Armed Forces Legal Aid Network
- Prairie State Legal Services
- Nicor Sharing Program
- Rolling Thunder Illinois Chapter 1
- Fraternal Order of Police Lodge #14
- Community Contacts
- Midwest Shelter for Homeless Veterans
- Support Over Stigma

Servicemembers and Veterans Treatment Court

The Veterans Treatment Court began accepting participants in June of 2018 and has a team that consists of Judge Christine Downs and representatives from the Kane County State's Attorney's Office, Kane County Public Defender's Office, Kane County Court Services, Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital, Veterans Assistance Commission, and a mentor coordinator. Veterans Treatment Court has enabled its participants to meet treatment goals and improve their quality of life. Our staff is proud of the work that the participants have done and equally proud of our partners in facilitating that success. We celebrated two graduations in 2024 and our other participants made significant progress towards living a clean and fulfilling life. The purpose of the program is best described as legislated by the Illinois General Assembly in the Veterans and Servicemembers Court Treatment Act (730 ILCS 167/5):

The General Assembly recognizes that veterans and active servicemembers, including Reserve and National Guard servicemembers, have provided or are currently providing an invaluable service to our country. Some veterans and active duty servicemembers may suffer from the effects of their service, including, but not limited to, post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, depression and may also suffer co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorder problems. As a result, some veterans or active duty servicemembers come into contact with the criminal justice system and are charged with felony or misdemeanor offenses. There is a critical need for the criminal justice system to recognize veterans, provide accountability for their wrongdoing, provide for the safety of the public, and provide for the treatment of such veterans. It is the intent of the General Assembly to create specialized veteran and servicemember courts in accordance with evidence-based practices and Problem-Solving Court Standards for addressing substance use, mental health, and co-occurring disorders with the necessary flexibility to meet the specialized needs for an array of services and supports among participants in certified veteran and servicemember court programs in the State.

The statistics in this Section are current as of Fiscal Year 2023 and were in most part compiled by and are shared with the consent of Kane County Court Services. We appreciate their generosity.

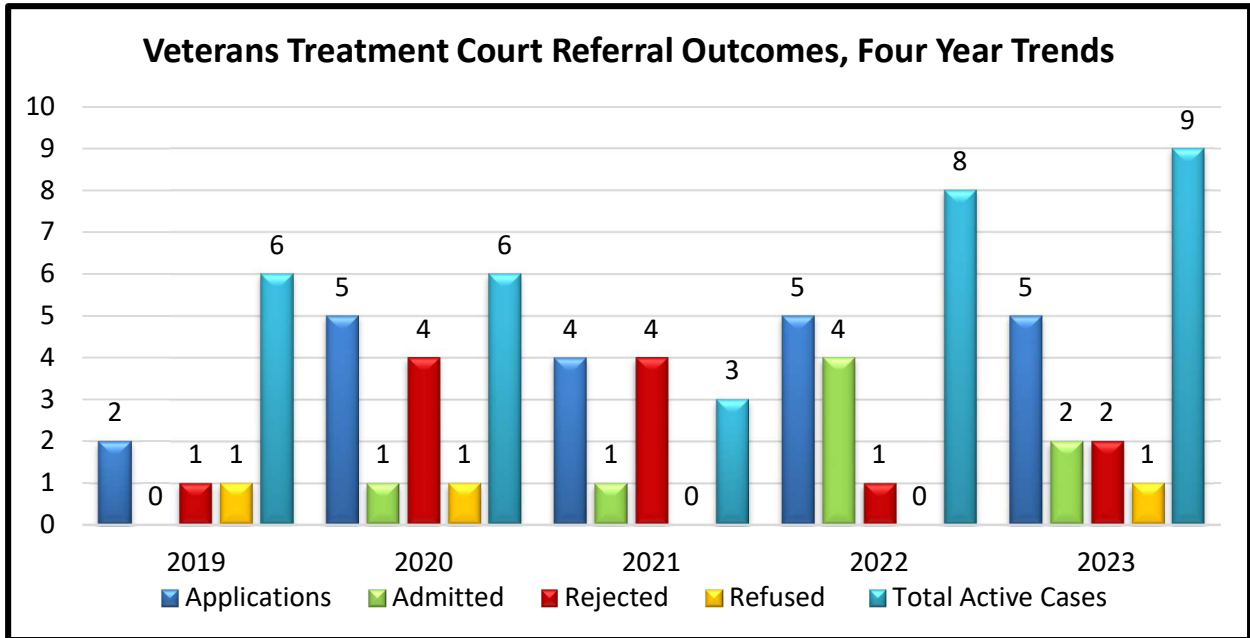


Figure 1. Here, the data shows the trends in admissions to Veterans Treatment Court. The trend continues to fluctuate due to the differences in charges being admitted into the Court as well as the implementation of a new “Low Risk” track. [3]

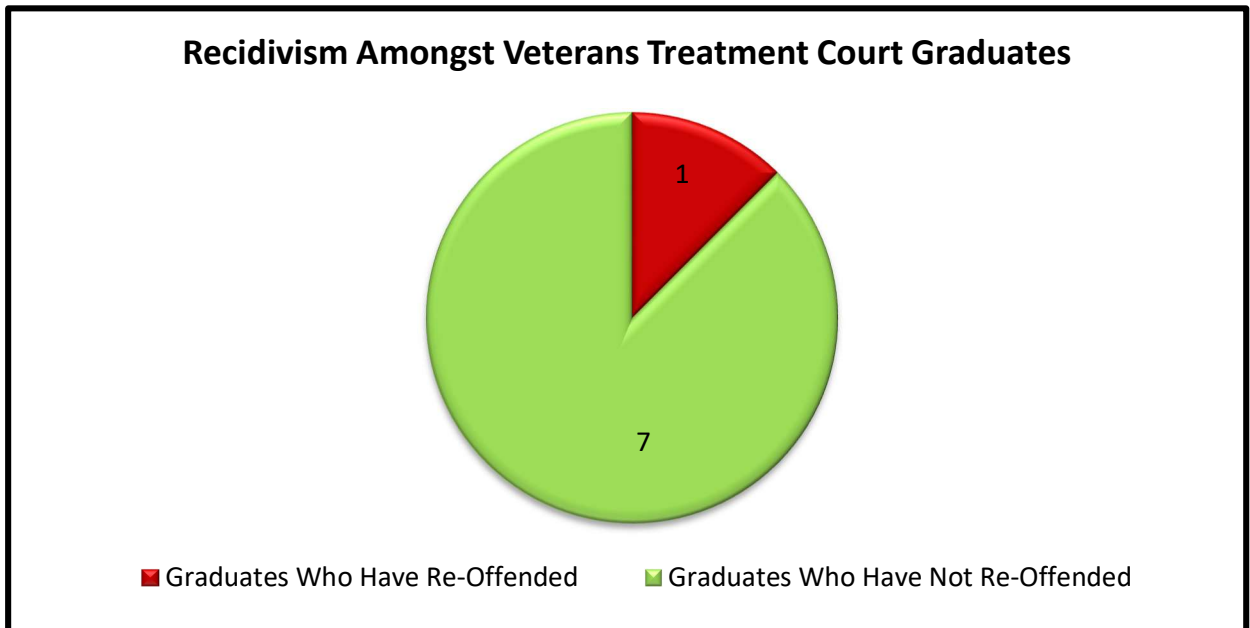


Figure 2. This data is obtained from graduates’ self-reported arrests or was obtained by publicly available court records from Kane and nearby counties. It should be noted that this chart represents arrests and not convictions. We are currently exploring ways to empirically obtain and track this data with higher confidence. So far, the data suggests that our graduates are in large part successful in maintaining their sobriety and crime-free lives.

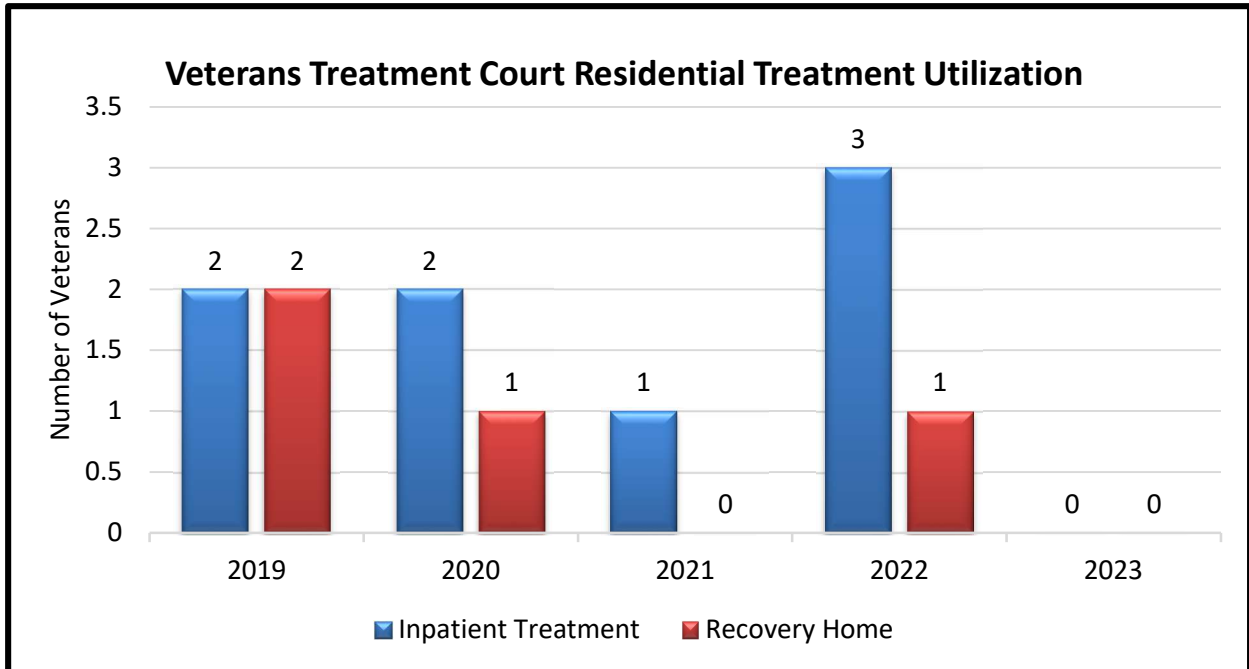


Figure 3. *Veterans Treatment Court uses a variety of VA and non-VA treatment methods including Inpatient Treatment and Recovery homes. Treatment is the focus for the Court, with an individual treatment plan being developed for each participant and then verification of that treatment on an ongoing basis. [3]*

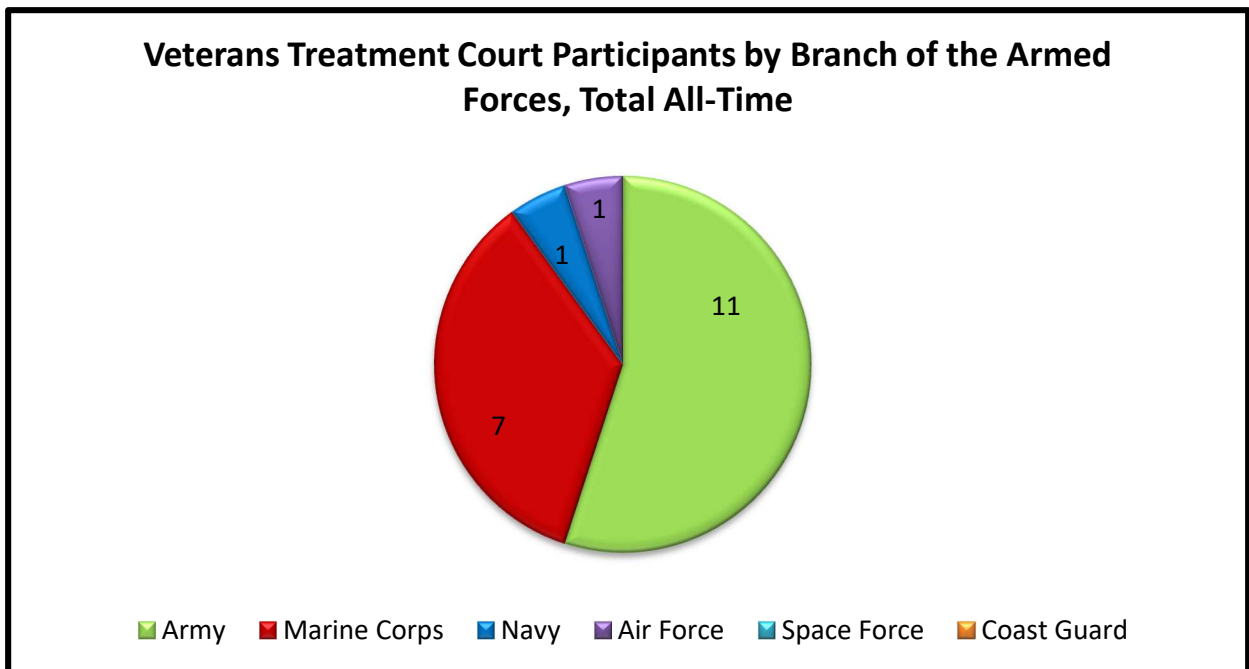


Figure 4. *This chart shows the branch of the Armed Forces that Veterans Treatment Court participant served in. Since some veterans have served in multiple branches of the military, some participants have been counted more than once in this chart.*

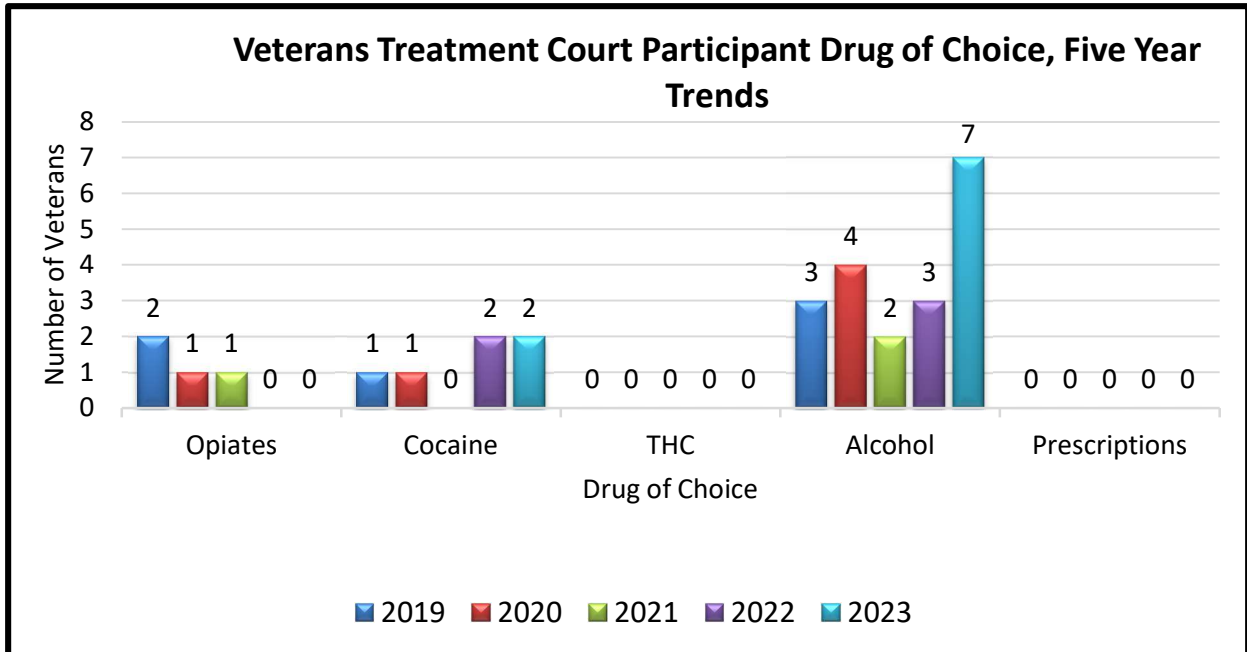


Figure 5. Alcohol has been the predominant drug of choice for Veterans Treatment Court since its inception. [3]

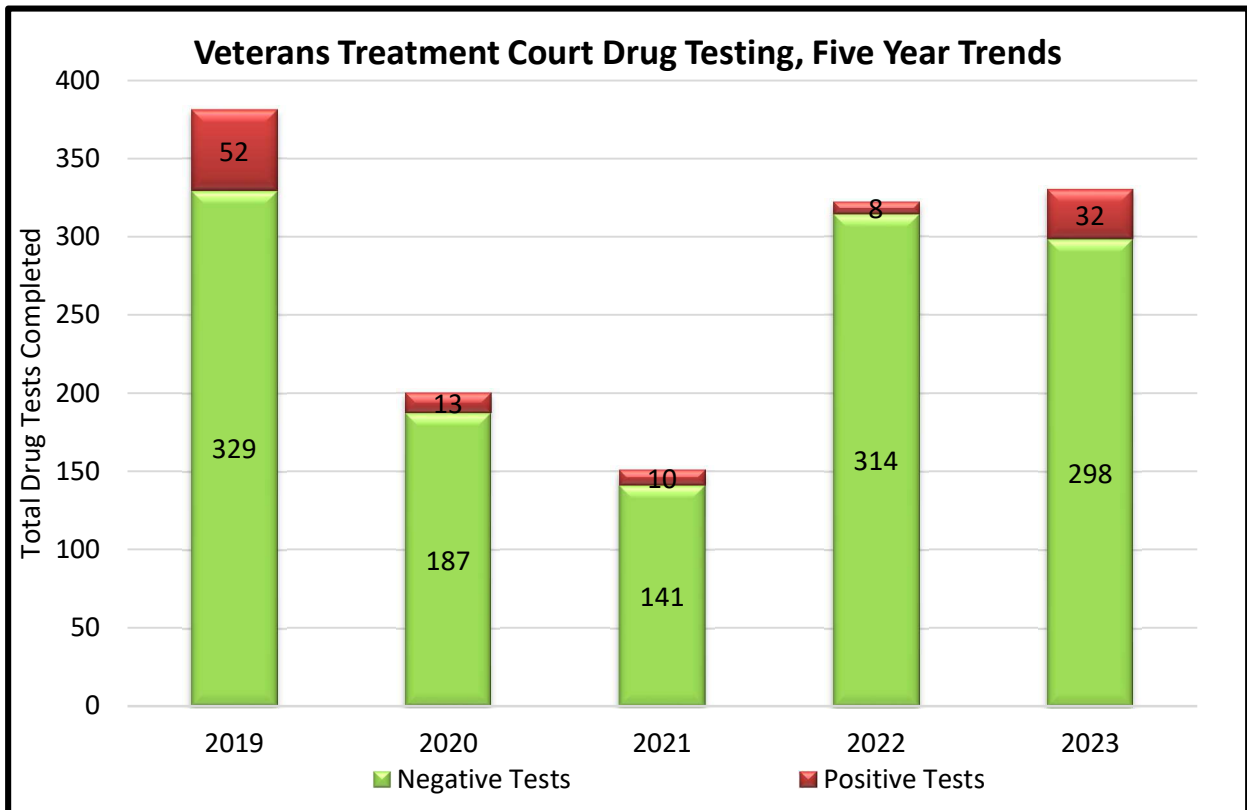


Figure 6. Veterans Treatment Court conducts random drug and alcohol testing on participants multiple times each week throughout the duration of their time in the program. Largely, the participants abstain from substance use throughout their participation and certain sobriety milestones must be met in order to progress through the program and ultimately graduate. [3]

General Kane County Veteran Statistics

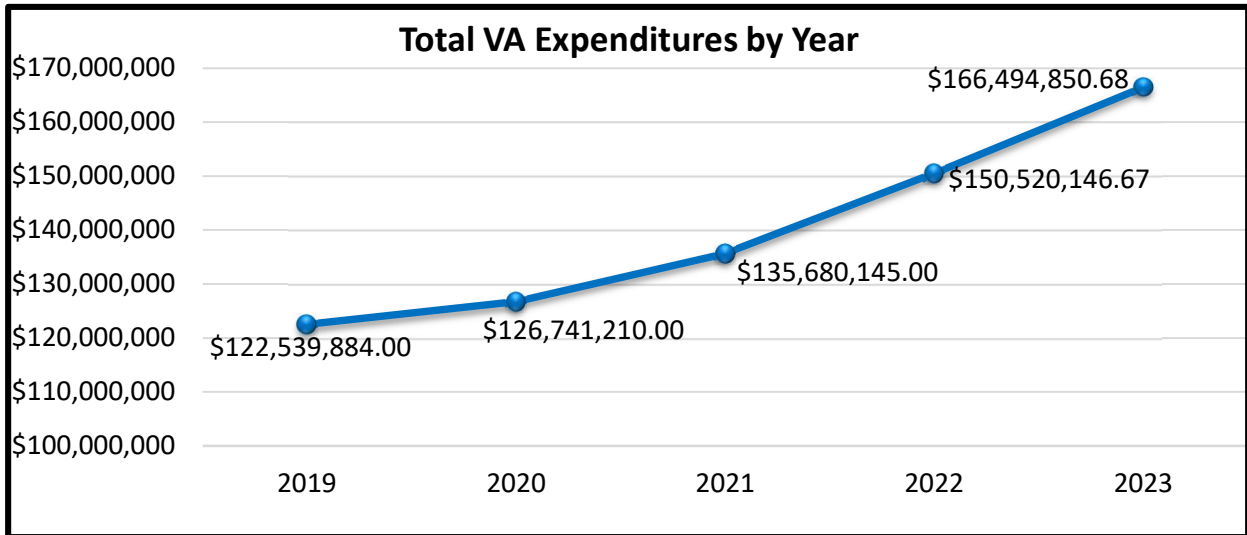


Figure 1. Total VA Expenditures in Kane County by Federal Fiscal Year. *Fiscal Year 2024 data is not yet available from the VA. [4]

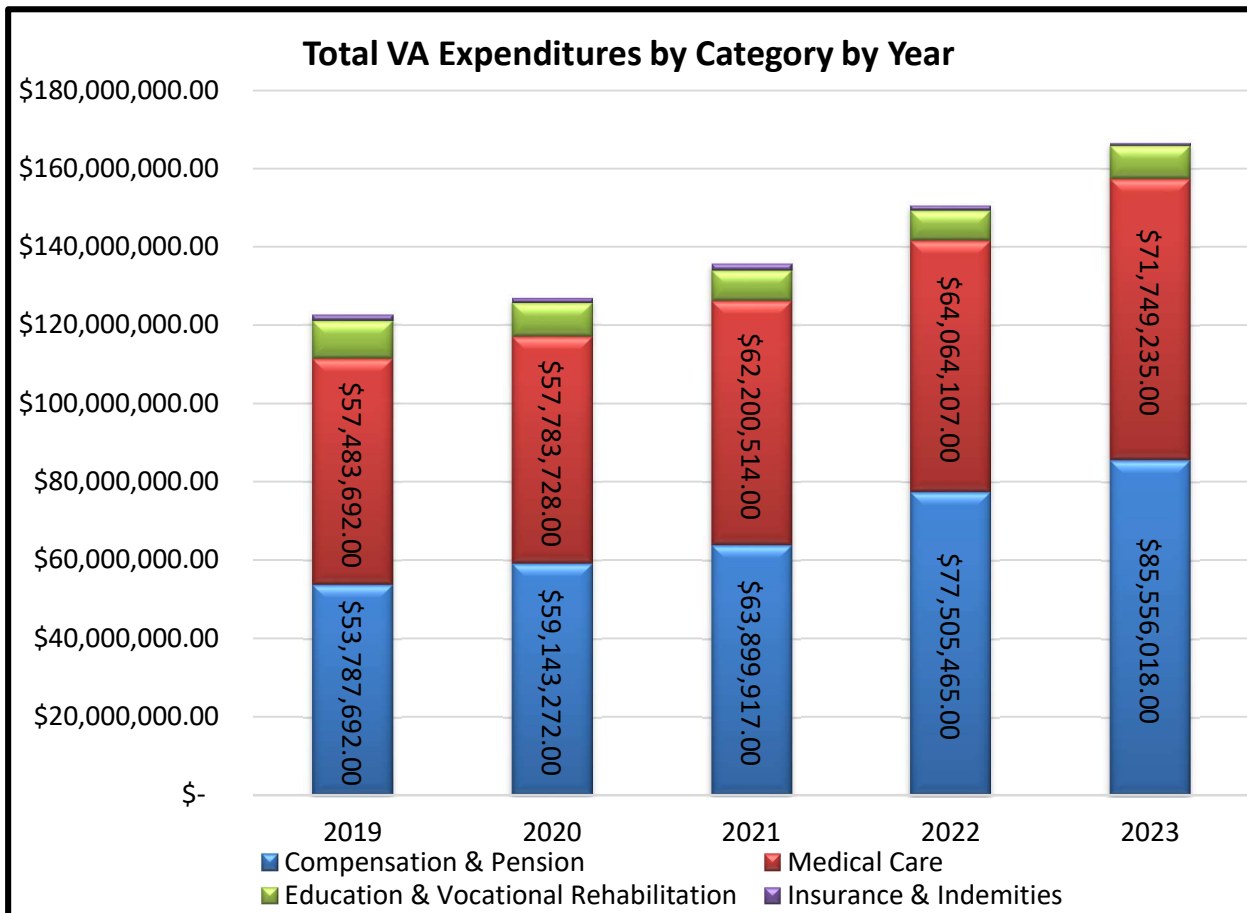


Figure 2. VA Expenditures in Kane County by benefit category by Federal Fiscal Year. *Fiscal Year 2024 data is not yet available from the VA. [4]

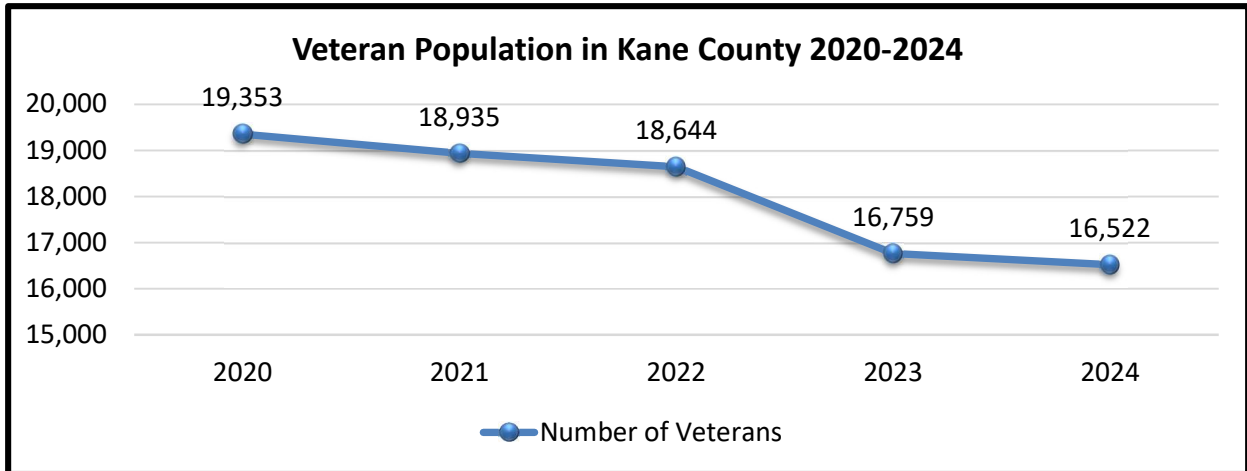


Figure 3. The veteran population in the U.S. is projected to decline by 38% by 2053. [5]

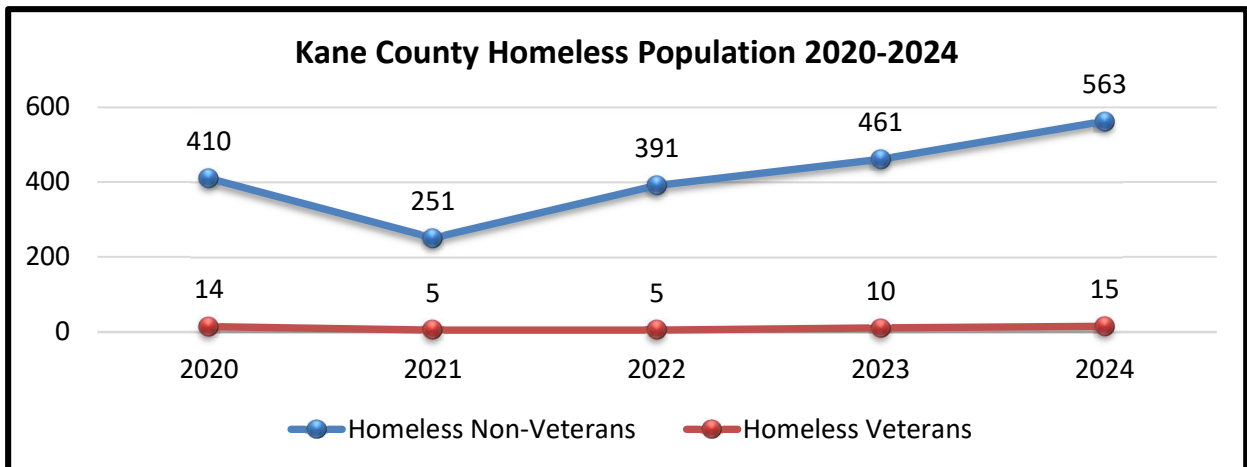


Figure 4. The interagency Kane County Homeless Veterans Task Force is actively engaging the homeless veteran population to reduce its number and achieve “Functional Zero.” [6]

<u>2024 Statistics</u>	<u>Kane County</u>	<u>Illinois</u>	<u>United States</u>
Veteran Population Rate (2023) [5] [8]:	3.3%	4.8%	5.4%
Veterans Over Age 65 [5]:	50.6%	40%	45.6%
Female Veteran Rate [5]:	7.2%	10%	11.3%
Veteran Median Income (2023) [8]:	\$61,666	\$52,170	\$52,122
Civilian Median Income (2023) [8]:	\$44,905	\$42,190	\$40,368

Figure 5. General Statistics for 2024 unless otherwise noted.

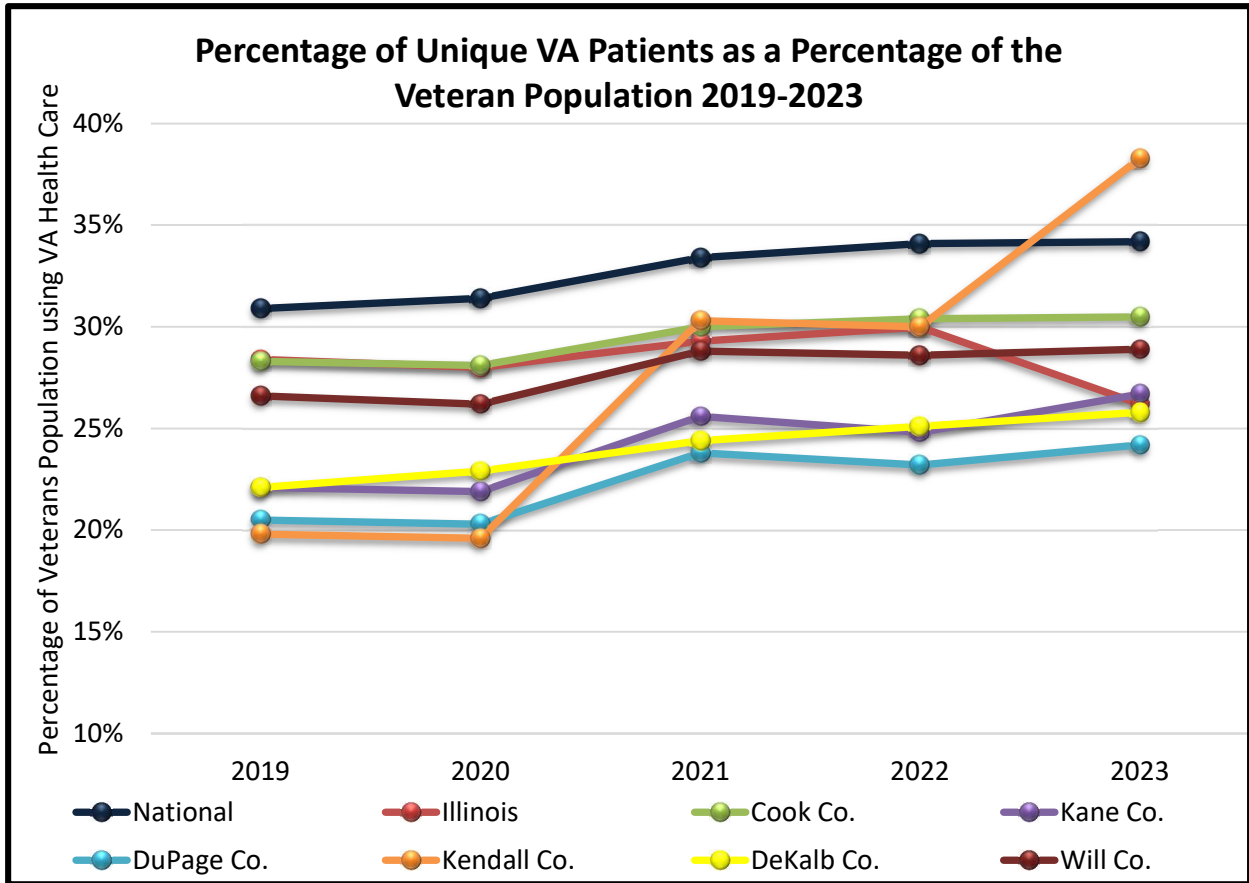


Figure 6. This chart contrasts the percentage of veterans utilizing the VA for their health care locally and nationally. Consistent with the national trend, Kane County veterans continue to use the VA at a greater rate than they had in the past. *Fiscal Year 2024 data is not yet available from the VA. [4]

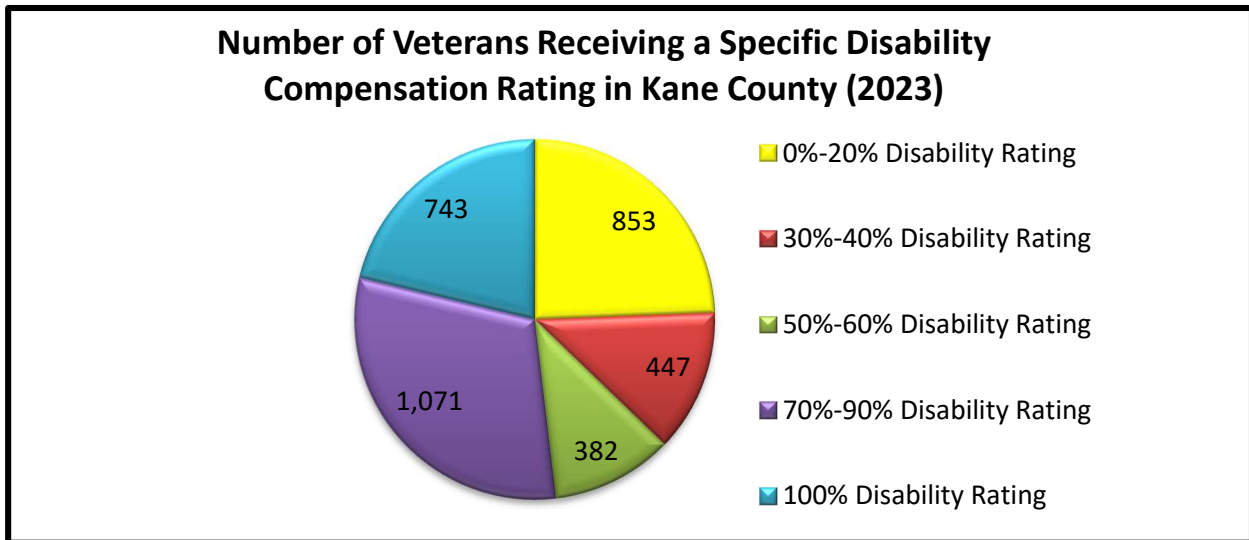


Figure 7. Total number of veterans in Kane County receiving a specific disability rating. *Fiscal Year 2024 data is not yet available from the VA. [7]

Client Reviews

It's the thoughtfulness of people like you that makes the world so bright. I appreciate all of your work you have done for me. I am truly grateful.

-J.S.

I will never be able to thank you enough, you made what I didn't even know was a possibility for me truly become possible. I will never forget the effort and time you put into this.

-C.A.

Words can't express my thanks enough to the team of the Veterans Assistance Commission of Kane County, IL.

-C.A.

Thank you again for helping our family keep our mom happy, comfortable, and we appreciate everything you did to make that happen

-K.H.

I am forever grateful that you refiled the application to go back quite a few years for disability payments. I was totally surprised at the payout.

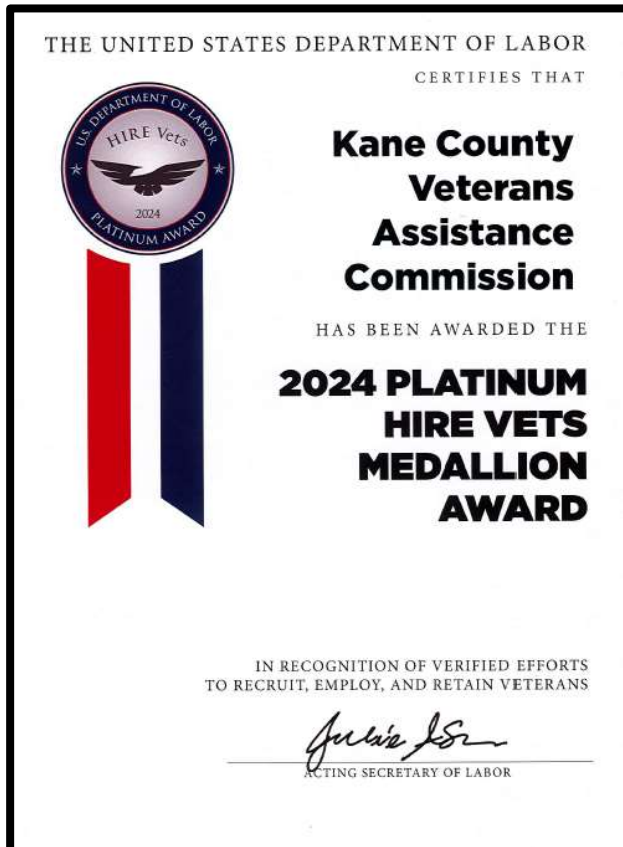
-C.H.

I want to let you know how important your help is to Vietnam veterans like myself. Thank you for the important work you do every day serving veterans.

-A.G.

Awards

Veteran Service Officer Jesus Arteaga was the recipient of the Illinois Association of County Veterans Assistance Commissions 2024 *Steve Barrett Veteran Service Officer of the Year Award*. This award is the only award given by Association for exceptional performance in filing veterans benefits claims. VSO Arteaga's nomination highlighted his work with a cognitively impaired veteran and his spouse in an appeal before an Administrative Law Judge at the Board of Veterans Appeals. VSO Arteaga successfully argued the case resulting in over \$100,000.00 being awarded in retroactive benefits to this veteran.



For the first time in its history, the Veterans Assistance Commission was recognized for its work in hiring and retaining veterans on its staff. Notably, our office is the only one in the Chicagoland area that is comprised solely of veterans. The HIRE Vets Medallion Award honors verified efforts by employers to recruit, employ, and retain veterans as well as to provide community and charitable services supporting the veteran community. We are honored to have receive this award and look forward to our continued work to enhance the welfare of veterans who call Kane County home.

Glossary of Terms

Compensation: See “Disability Compensation”

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.

Functional Zero: A goal reached when the number of veterans experiencing homelessness within a community is less than the average number of veterans being connected with permanent housing each month.

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.

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

Pension: See “Non-Service Connected Pension”

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.

Regional Office: One of 56 VA offices located nationwide responsible for processing and adjudicating VA benefits which primarily includes disability compensation.

Superintendent: Supervisor who has the executive powers of the Veterans Assistance Commission.

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

VA Health Care: A comprehensive medical benefits package available to qualifying veterans which includes primary and specialty care at VA hospitals and clinics.

Veterans Service Officer (VSO): An individual accredited by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and trained to assist veterans and their dependents in filing claims for benefits with the VA.

References

- [1] Veterans Benefits Administration, "Annual Benefits Reports," U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington D.C., 2022-2023.
- [2] Veterans Benefits Administration, "Monday Morning Workload Reports," U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington D.C., 2023-2024.
- [3] Kane County Court Services, "Annual Report," State of Illinois 16th Judicial Circuit, Saint Charles, 2023.
- [4] National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, "Geographical Distribution of VA Expenditures Reports," U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington D.C., 2019-2023.
- [5] National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, "Veterans Population Model," U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington D.C., 2023.
- [6] U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Homeless Populations and Subpopulations," U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Washington D.C., 2020-2024.
- [7] National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, "Compensation and Pension by County Report," U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington D.C., 2023.
- [8] U.S. Census Bureau, "American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates," U.S. Department of Commerce, Washington D.C., 2023.