VETERANS AFFAIRS

Report to the Board of Commissioners

SERVICE. ADVOCACY. COMMUNITY.

The Gratiot County Department of Veterans Affairs connects veterans and their eligible family members with earned benefits, claims assistance, and community resources.

Director's Overview

The department's activity reflects both direct claims work and an ongoing commitment to being visible and accessible throughout the community. Year-over-year figures show growth in new claims and new client intakes. In addition to assisting veterans through the benefits process, the office has continued to build relationships with local organizations, participate in community events, and support opportunities that connect veterans with one another and with available resources.

The current workload snapshot includes 81 claims awaiting VA decisions and 36 claims on the department's waitlist that are being worked. These are separate workload measures and should not be added together.

Reporting Note: FY2025 and FY2026 figures are annual totals supplied for this report. Pending decisions and waitlist figures are current point-in-time counts. The numbers reported here do not include pensions, survivor's benefits, claims for headstones, healthcare, or any other forms we assist veterans with.

Claims Activity	FY2026
New Compensation Claims Filed	225
Other VA Benefit forms Filed (Pensions, Headstones, Survivor Benefits, Healthcare, etc.)	1,273
Compensation Claims Closed following VA Decisions	218
Compensation Claims Awaiting VA Decisions	81
Compensation Claims Waitlist (being worked)	36
New Client Intakes	240

SERVICE ACTIVITY & RESULTS

Fiscal-year comparison

Activity	FY2025	FY2026	Change
New Compensation Claims	172	225	+53 (+30.8%)
New Client Intakes	142	240	+98 (+69.0%)

What the numbers show

New claims increased from 172 in FY2025 to 225 in FY2026, an increase of 53 claims (30.8%).

New client intakes increased from 142 to 240, an increase of 98 intakes (69.0%). This represents a substantial increase in the number of new individuals entering the department's service process.

OUTREACH & COMMUNITY PRESENCE

Connecting With Veterans Beyond the Office

Outreach is an important part of the department's work. Community presence helps veterans learn where to turn for assistance, strengthens relationships with partner organizations, and creates opportunities for direct conversation outside a traditional office appointment.

Community Events and Visibility

The department has also maintained a presence at community gatherings and veteran-focused events throughout the year. This included the Honor Flight Reunion, the Veterans Suicide Prevention Ride, multiple reverse raffles hosted at the VFW in St. Louis, accompaniment and support for the Vietnam Moving Wall, the car show in Ithaca, and other local events. Ongoing events we attend at the Mid-Michigan Heroes Center include their weekly donuts and coffee, monthly food distribution, and the monthly breakfast held at the American Legion in St. Louis. We have also attended the Blues event held at the Alma Elks Club, various speaking engagements to spread awareness in the community.

The Director also serves as a trustee on the Executive Committee of the Great Lakes National Cemetery Advisory Council. This role includes attending monthly advisory council meetings and participating in cemetery events throughout the year. Continued involvement supports communication, collaboration, and a sustained connection to the cemetery's mission of honoring veterans and their families.

PARTNERSHIPS & CONTINUED SERVICE

Building relationships that support veterans and their families

Community partnerships in action



















Looking Ahead

The department will continue providing claims assistance, monitoring pending claims, working through its active waitlist, and maintaining a visible presence in the community. Beginning with the next report, monthly updates will provide commissioners with current service activity, workload figures, and outreach highlights to support ongoing awareness of the department's work.

Strategic Goals and Future Outlook

The upcoming year focuses on expanding our community footprint and optimizing internal operations to better serve our county's veterans and their families.

Community Outreach and Partnership Expansion

- **Broaden Demographics:** Expand targeted outreach campaigns and strategic partnerships to support underserved veteran populations, specifically focusing on residents and spouses in long-term care facilities, justice-involved veterans, and local National Guard units.
- **Maximize State Resources:** Collaborate directly with Michigan Veteran Trust Fund (MVTF) leadership to strengthen resource allocation, streamline application pipelines, and maximize financial support for local community members.

Operational Excellence & Infrastructure

- **Standardized Operations:** Develop and implement comprehensive Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to institutionalize office knowledge and ensure consistent service delivery.
- **Modernize Governance:** Conduct a thorough review of existing policies and administrative workflows to eliminate operational bottlenecks and improve overall efficiency.
- **Stabilize & Elevate Post-Transition Infrastructure:** Capitalize on this year's foundational transition by organizing internal data, aligning team roles, and establishing a culture of continuous professional development and advanced training to consistently discover innovative ways to advocate for and support our veterans.

Respectfully submitted,

Kayla Webster
Director, Gratiot County Department of Veterans Affairs