Shawano County Veterans Service Office 2025 Annual Report

PREPARED BY SHAWANO COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE

2025 Annual Report | Prepared in 2026

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Mission Statement

The Shawano County Veterans Service Office mission is to assist Shawano County Veterans and their families with obtaining local, state, and federal veteran related benefits in accordance with applicable state and federal laws and regulations.

We accomplish this by explaining eligibility, application, preparation, and proper documentation to present Compensation, Pension, or Burial related claims to the Department of Veteran Affairs to process and make a determination of benefits.

Collectively and respectfully, we move mutually forward to maximize their benefits. Our office is committed to outstanding customer service, advocacy, and empathy as veterans and family members seek out eligible benefit entitlements.

To do so, our office must obtain and maintain credentials through the Veterans Administration and affiliated service organizations both on a federal and state level by successful completion of conference training sessions and computer base training throughout the year.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

COUNTY BOARD / BOARD OF PUBLIC HEALTH & VETERAN SERVICES

ADMINISTRATIVE COORDINATOR
JAMES DAVEL

COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER / DIRECTOR
PAUL PIONKE

VETERANS BENEFITS SPECIALIST
LEWIS DRUMHELLER

OFFICE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT III
SHASTA KUHN

2025 CVSO STAFF

CVSO/Director Paul Pionke – Hired July 27, 2022 – Honorable Discharge, MSgt (E-7), U.S. Air Force.

Veterans Benefits Specialist Lewis Drumheller – Hired January 8, 2024 – Honorable Discharge, SPC (E-4), U.S. Army.

Administrative Assistant III Shasta Kuhn – Hired November 4, 2024.

2025 ANNUAL THEME: EDUCATION

The office's 2025 mission theme was Education, with an emphasis on helping Veterans, dependents, students, community partners, and local organizations better understand the benefits and resources available to them. The office continued to combine direct claims assistance with outreach throughout Shawano County.

2025 Notable Events and Outreach

- 105 outreach and meeting activities were recorded during 2025, including recurring outreach in Wittenberg, Gresham, Tigerton, and Birnamwood.
- Educational outreach included Youth Government Day, Wisconsin GI Bill presentations at area high schools, and participation in a high school Veterans Day ceremony.
- The office maintained regular engagement with local American Legion and VFW posts, Shawano Health Services, Shawano Place, community groups, and home-visit contacts.
- Public awareness efforts included WTCH radio appearances, the Shawano County Fair, Veterans Day activities, and community meetings throughout the county.
- Staff continued professional development through WDVA meetings, regional meetings, and conference training in Superior and Eau Claire.

The goal remained consistent: make Veteran benefits easier to understand, make assistance more accessible, and bring services closer to Veterans throughout the county.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

The Shawano County Veterans Service Office assists Veterans, surviving spouses, dependents, and family members in navigating complex federal and state benefit systems. Staff provide claims assistance, education, document preparation, evidence development, referrals, and advocacy so eligible individuals can pursue the benefits they have earned.

2025 VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE ACTIVITY

1,041 Walk-ins	**2,081** Incoming Phone Calls	**353** Appointments	**402** Uploads
105 Outreach / Meetings	**46** Notary Services	**127** Mail In	**68** Mail Out

Year	Mail In	Mail Out	Phone Calls	Walk-ins	Appointments	Uploads	Outreach
2021	248	378	1,956	557	67	206	28
2022	264	586	3,359	1,073	270	643	49
2023	157	139	2,376	894	390	426	57
2024	157	98	2,514	1,268	481	564	169
2025	**127**	**68**	**2,081**	**1,041**	**353**	**402**	**105**

Source: 2021–2024 activity figures are carried forward from the prior annual report; 2025 figures are from the Shawano County Veterans Service Office Weekly Activity Report (WAR).

VA EXPENDITURES ASSOCIATED WITH SHAWANO COUNTY

Year	Veteran Population	Total VA Expenditures	Compensation / Pension	Medical Care
2021	2,941	$25,930,000	$12,974,000	$12,112,000
2022	2,802	$30,423,000	$14,794,000	$15,113,000
2023	2,712	$31,609,000	$16,191,000	$14,881,000
2024	—	**$36,530,117**	**$16,758,274**	**$17,542,326**

FY2024 is the latest county-level GDX expenditure data published by VA. VA revised the FY2024 GDX methodology, so FY2024 figures are not directly comparable with prior years. The FY2024 expenditure workbook does not include a county Veteran population figure.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND PARTNERSHIPS

Outreach remained a core part of the office's work in 2025. The office brought information and assistance into communities across Shawano County and maintained relationships with Veteran service organizations, health and residential facilities, schools, civic groups, media, and other community partners.

Education and Community Presence

- Recurring community outreach included Wittenberg, Gresham, Tigerton, and Birnamwood, along with home visits when needed.
- Youth Government Day continued in 2025, giving area students an opportunity to learn more about county government and public service.
- The office supported the 2025 Education theme with Wisconsin GI Bill outreach at Tigerton High School and Shawano High School.
- The office participated in the Shawano County Fair and Veterans Day activities, including a high school Veterans Day ceremony and local Veteran organization events.
- Community engagement included Shawano Health Services, Shawano Place, the Shawano Woman's Club, historical organizations, American Legion and VFW posts, and local media.

County Cemetery Flags and Flag Holders

The Veterans Service Office has worked with local Veterans service organizations, donors, Scouts, and community partners to support the placement of flags and flag holders on Veteran graves throughout Shawano County. The program remains an important visible reminder of service and sacrifice in local cemeteries.

Training and Professional Development

Maintaining accreditation and current knowledge requires ongoing training. During 2025, the office recorded WDVA and regional meetings, conference training, and other professional-development activities designed to keep staff current on changing VA rules, benefits, and claims processes.

BENEFIT PROGRAMS
FOR VETERANS AND DEPENDENTS

FEDERAL BENEFITS

Service-Connected Disability Compensation: Monthly compensation for disabilities related to military service.

Non-Service-Connected Pension: Income-based pension assistance for eligible wartime Veterans who meet age or disability requirements.

Survivor Benefits: Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC), Survivors Pension, and other eligible benefits for surviving spouses and dependents.

VA Health Care: Assistance with enrollment and access to VA health care and related programs.

Burial and Memorial Benefits: Assistance with burial allowances, flags, headstones or markers, and other memorial benefits.

Education and Training: Post-9/11 GI Bill, Veteran Readiness & Employment, Dependents' Educational Assistance, and related programs.

VA Home Loan Eligibility: Assistance with Certificate of Eligibility questions and referrals for the VA Home Loan Guaranty program.

Discharge Review / Upgrade Guidance: Information and referral assistance for Veterans seeking review of a less-than-honorable discharge characterization.

VA Life Insurance: Information and assistance with eligible VA life insurance programs.

STATE OF WISCONSIN BENEFITS

Aid to Needy Veterans Grant: May provide eligible assistance for health care and subsistence needs.

Wisconsin Veterans Homes: Residential and skilled nursing options for eligible Veterans and spouses.

Camp American Legion: Assistance with information and applications for eligible camp programs in Tomahawk.

Funeral Honors Program: Information and coordination support for eligible military funeral honors.

Wisconsin GI Bill: Tuition remission at eligible University of Wisconsin and Wisconsin Technical College System schools for qualifying Veterans and family members.

Veterans and Surviving Spouses Property Tax Credit: State income tax credit for eligible Veterans with qualifying service-connected disability ratings and eligible surviving spouses.

Veteran Identifier: Assistance with verification for adding Veteran status to a Wisconsin driver license or identification card.

Note: Eligibility varies by program. The Veterans Service Office assists Veterans and family members in determining which benefits may apply to their individual circumstances.

LOOKING AHEAD

The 2025 annual theme of Education reinforced the importance of taking benefit information beyond the office and into the community. Moving forward, the Shawano County Veterans Service Office will continue building on that foundation through proactive outreach, stronger partnerships, improved access to services, and continued focus on high-quality claims advocacy.

- Continue expanding outreach and community education throughout Shawano County.
- Strengthen relationships with Veteran service organizations, schools, health providers, civic groups, and other community partners.
- Maintain training, accreditation, and staff development to stay current with VA and Wisconsin benefit programs.
- Improve the Veteran experience by making services easier to access, understand, and navigate.
- Use office activity data and Veteran feedback to guide future programs and service improvements.

CONCLUSION

In 2025, the Shawano County Veterans Service Office continued to provide direct assistance while maintaining a strong presence throughout the county. The office recorded 1,041 walk-ins, 2,081 incoming phone calls, 353 appointments, 402 document uploads, and 105 outreach and meeting activities.

The value of this work is measured not only in activity totals or benefit dollars, but also in the trust Veterans and their families place in the office when they need help. Our commitment remains to serve every Veteran with dedicated, accessible, and trusted advocacy.

Respectfully Submitted,

Shawano County Veterans Service Office

Data sources: Shawano County Veterans Service Office Weekly Activity Report (2025); prior Shawano County Veterans Service Office annual report; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, FY2024 Geographic Distribution of VA Expenditures.