

CLAYTON COUNTY VETERANS AFFAIRS MEETING
CLAYTON COUNTY OFFICE BUILDING/CONFERENCE ROOM 1
600 Gunder Road NE, Elkader, Iowa 52043
May 12, 2025, at 7:30 a.m.

The Veterans Commission Meeting was called to order at 7:30 a.m. on May 12, 2025, at the Clayton County Office Building Meeting Conference Room #1.

I.) Roll Call: Commissioners Clark, Torkelson, and Jordan, Director, were present. Eilers was absent.

II.) Approval of Minutes: Motion was made by Clark to approve the minutes from the April 14, 2025 meeting, seconded by Torkelson. Motion carried unanimously.

III.) Public Comments: No comments were noted.

IV.) Budget Review: Jordan distributed the current Fiscal Budget for Period Ending: April 30, 2025. The Veterans Affairs office spent \$15,394.84 during the month of April 2025. A total of 25.45% remains in the budget for the year. Clark made the motion to approve the budget, Torkelson seconded the motion; the motion carried unanimously.

V.) Old Business:

a). Discussion was held regarding the 28E Agreement enforced when VSO position is vacant. Jordan spoke with peers in Allamakee County to establish an agreement for joint services in the event of a vacancy. A Proactive Agreement should be in place before the absence of VSO occurs. Other counties in our area may be contacted to see if they also have an interest. Clayton County may also receive support for Veterans through the Iowa Department of Veteran Affairs (IDVA) in the event of a vacancy.

b). The Trust Fund with the Iowa Department of Veterans affairs has been updated. The process addresses funding for emergencies. Three members of the Commission must complete and submit the application for Veterans requesting assistance.

c). The Iowa Department of Veteran Affairs may continue training virtually instead of in-person training. Most counties liked the flexibility. The IDVA is establishing a five-year training schedule. Their recommendations will determine what training will look like and the dates to be held.

d). Jordan will contact the Clayton County Human Resources Officer to obtain an evaluation form for assessing the VSO performance of duties assigned.

VI.) New Business:

a). To reach out to younger veterans and their families, the Elkader Theater was contacted by the VSO. Jordan said that he had received a good response to this initiative. He commented that the advertising cost \$1400.00 with publications in the Trader, Register, Website for Veterans Affairs, and on Facebook. Jordan said that 80 tickets had been purchased at the price of \$430.00. 18 tickets have been requested serving 5 households identifying 4 new veterans to the County.

b). The April Statistical Report was distributed. 26 total number of calls received this month re: Veteran related concerns. 13 total office visits from Veterans. 2 home visits for Veterans. 1 outreach event and 2 training events.

c). VA Ends Gender Dysphoria Treatments. In compliance with President Trump's recent executive order, the US Department of Veterans Affairs will begin phasing out medical treatment related to gender dysphoria. The executive order establishes a policy recognizing only two sexes – male and female. The VA will adjust its health care offerings to align with the directive, which includes ending specific treatments for veterans diagnosed with or displaying signs of

gender dysphoria. VE Secretary Collins confirmed that all financial resources previously allocated to these treatments will be reallocated to support veterans with severe physical injuries. Additionally, the VA will no longer offer cross-sex hormone therapy or other gender-related medical interventions except under two conditions: *The veteran is already receiving cross-sex hormone treatment through the VA, or *The veteran was receiving such care through the military at the time of separation and is eligible for ongoing VA healthcare. Those not meeting the criteria will no longer be eligible to initiate or receive gender dysphoria related treatments through the VA. Other gender-affirming interventions will no longer be provided.

d.) VA is committed to providing comprehensive and compassionate care to support the emotional and psychological well-being of veterans. The VA offers a range of mental health services and benefits to help veterans manage conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, substance abuse disorders and suicidal thoughts. Most Veterans who served in active military were discharged under conditions other than dishonorable are eligible for VA healthcare, including mental health services. Certain mental services are available to veterans who are not enrolled in VA healthcare, particularly those at risk of homelessness, suicide, or for those in crisis. Mental health treatments provided by the VA include peer support and virtual counseling. Outpatient counseling is available through VA medical centers and clinics. Inpatient and residential treatment is available for veterans requiring intensive mental health care. Suicide presentation remains a top priority. The Veteran Crisis Line is available 24/7 by calling 988; texting 838255 or chatting online. Suicide prevention coordinators are embedded at every VA medical center to help veterans connected with mental health services.

VII. Review and approval of Claims:

VIII. Confirmation of the Next Meeting: Next meeting will be on June 9, 2025, at 7:30 a.m.

IX. Adjournment: Clark made the motion to adjourn, Torkelson seconded the motion; Motion unanimously carried. The meeting was adjourned at 8:28 a.m.

Respectfully submitted by Gerrie Torkelson

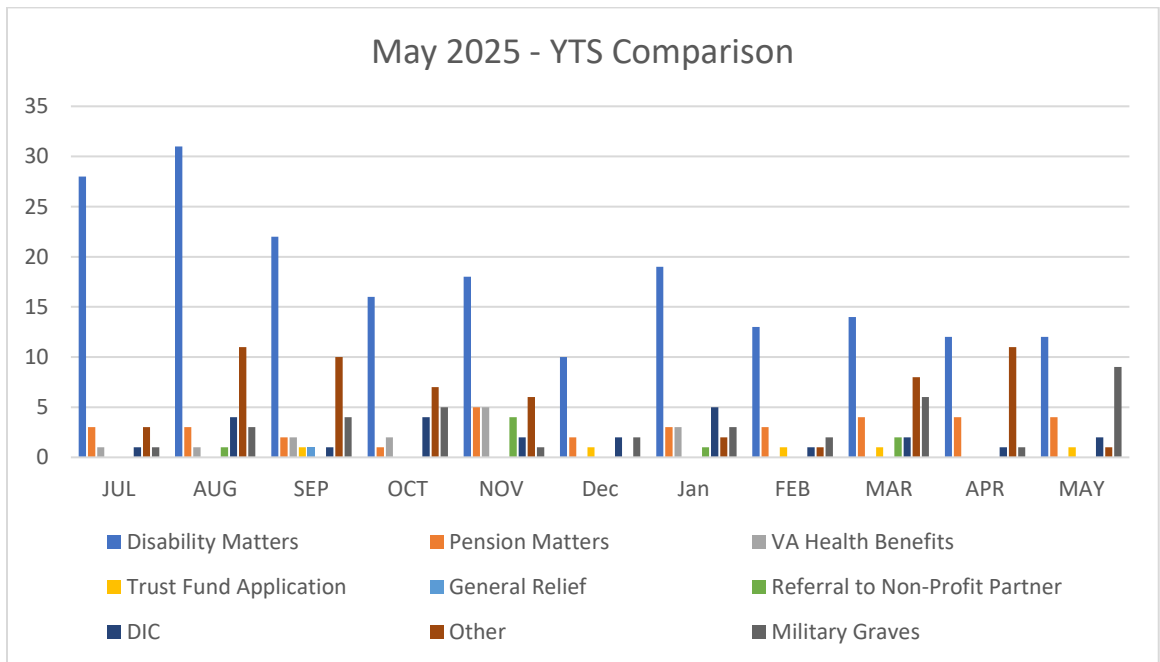
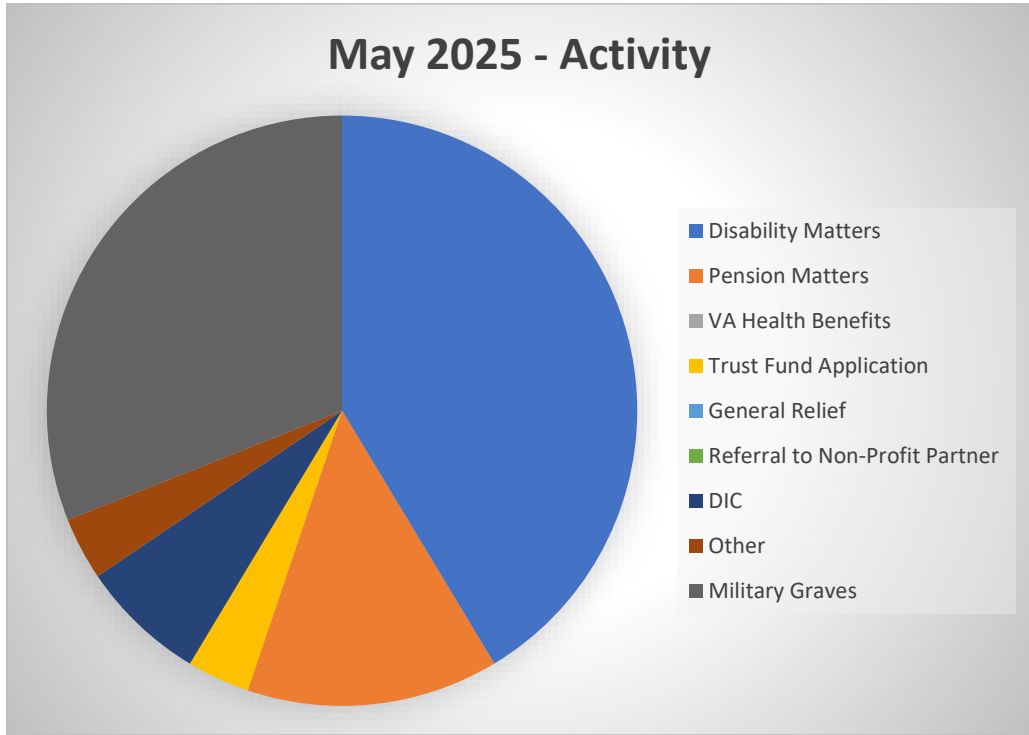
May Report

27 total number of calls received this month re: Veteran related concerns.

19 total office visits from Veterans.

1 home visits

1 training event



VA & State Updates:

VA Expands Access to Community Care

The US Department of Veterans Affairs announced an update to the VA's Community Care Program. The Community Care Program, which was established in 2018, enables eligible veterans to receive medical treatment from healthcare providers outside of the VA system. A veteran may qualify for care if:

- Needed services are not available at the VA facility.
- The veteran faces long wait times for VA appointments (more than 20 days for primary or mental health and 28 days for specialty care)
- The drive time to a VA care facility is excessive (over 30 minutes for primary or mental health care or over 60 minutes for specialty care)
- The Veteran lives in a state or US territory without a full-service VA hospital.
- The VA services do not meet quality standards.
- Receiving care in the community is in the best medical interest of the veteran.
- The Veteran qualifies under grandfathered provisions from previous Veterans Choice Programs.

Effective immediately, the VA is removing the extra review step which previously required the Veteran to obtain a second opinion letter from another VA doctor to support a request for community care. With this change, Veterans should experience quicker access to care whether that be at a VA facility or in the community.

VA Launches New Reforms to Support Survivors and Dependents

The Department of Veteran Affairs has announced a major initiative to improve the way it serves the survivors and dependents of deceased veterans and servicemembers. As of May 2025, the VA is introducing the following three key updates to better support survivors:

- Restoring the Office of Survivor Assistance – This will be realigned under the VA secretary where it can directly advise on survivor related policy and ensure that their voices are heard
- Launching “White-Glove” Survivor Outreach Team – This team will be based at the Philadelphia Regional Office and will guide eligible survivors through every step of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) claims process and offer hands-on support.
- Leveraging the use of automation to streamline benefit processing. Use of such tools should make processing claims faster and easier for survivors to navigate.

How to Contact the Office of Survivors Assistance?

Survivors who need assistance or have questions about their benefits can contact the office in a number of ways:

- Visit the VA's Ask VA Portal to submit questions, upload documents and get updates on claims. Ask.va.gov found at <https://www.va.gov/contact-us/ask-va/introduction> (Note this may require created a Login.gov or ID.me account)
- Call the VA main information line at 1 800-698-2411
- Contact the Survivor Benefit Coordinator at your local VA regional office
- Visit the VA's survivors benefits section found at <https://www.va.gov/family-and-caregiver-benefits/>