



N. Illinois Service and Benefit Officer Newsletter

February 2026

This Newsletter is published monthly as a Service and Reference for all Veterans, Veteran Family Members, and friends of Veterans. Each month multiple Veteran Military Organization sites (and other sources, as applicable) are queried for timely, relevant, and viable Veteran issues... issues that regardless of source, impact Veterans and their Family Members.

Nothing is provided in this newsletter that cannot be retrieved by the reader – all sources are cited. Articles and/or article excerpts below are simply provided for ease of access and/or reference.

This month, I am *again* addressing the topic of *Buddy Checks* – see the American Legion *article excerpt* below. This time of year is high season for depression and death by suicide. Don't let anything bad happen on your watch! Call/check on a buddy! I have also attached *article excerpts* about *Veteran Service Officers* – who they are and what they do. I am approached about this topic more than any other. The attached articles are very informative. That said, I recommend you keep this one simple.... simply contact one of the Certified/Professional Service Officer sources listed below.

Point of Contact information on recommended Certified/Professional Service Officer Assistance:

- **Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs Phone (IDVA) Phone: (815) 633-5875**
- **Veterans Assistance Commission of Winnebago County (VACWC), Phone: (815) 516-2850, Email vac@wincoil.us**

Remember... A simple phone call to a comrade can save a life. Check on your buddy!

u/R David

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The American Legion Buddy Check Program

Source: <https://www.legion.org/buddycheck/about>

In the first four years after The American Legion launched Buddy Checks as an official program, our members have reached more than **1 million veterans** and provided critical assistance.

The number of local American Legion posts conducting Buddy Check operations in those first four years has grown from 3,683 to 4,456.

Buddy Checks are not membership or fundraising calls; they are simple check-ins with veterans in the community to see how they are doing and to learn how the local post can help.

The **MyLegion.org** web platform contains contact information of American Legion members and former members.

The Department of Veterans Affairs launched its own **National Buddy Check Week** in 2023 and invites involvement from local American Legion posts.

American Legion posts are also strongly encouraged, by resolution, to make Buddy Check calls during Veterans Week (*mid-November*) and American Legion Birthday Week (*mid-March*).

Many American Legion posts have assembled Buddy Check teams that make calls monthly or even more frequently.

Buddy Check teams are urged to have at their fingertips a list of local resources available if needed.

These may be American Legion service officers, Vet Centers, VA healthcare facilities, or others who can help.

Veterans may be reminded of the **Veterans Crisis Line** in case they know of someone who needs urgent assistance, or if they need it themselves.

Read about how Buddy Checks work at the local level on [LEGIONTOWN.ORG/BUDDY-CHECKS](https://www.legion.org/buddycheck/about) or [SHARE YOUR OWN BUDDY CHECK STORY](https://www.legion.org/buddycheck/about)

ADDITIONAL OUTSIDE RESOURCES

- [VA Mental Health Resources](#)
- [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention \(AFSP\)](#)
- [Anxiety and Depression Association of America \(ADAA\)](#)
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#)
- [Mental Health America \(MHA\)](#)
- [National Institute of Mental Health \(NIMH\)](#)

Veteran Service Officers

Source: <https://veterans.illinois.gov/serviceoffices>.

To assist veterans in navigating the complex web of services and benefits available, IDVA runs full-time and part-time (itinerant) offices across the state. These offices are staffed by Veteran Service Officers (VSOs), fellow veterans who are experts on federal, state and local veteran resources.

[Find a VSO](#)

There are many ways to access our VSOs.

Use our [VSO Support Request](#) to be contacted by a VSO.

The easiest method is by providing IDVA with basic contact information [on this Stand Up and Be Counted web form](#); you will be contacted by your nearest VSO.

If you are a woman veteran who prefers to speak with one of our female VSOs, please click on this map of [women veteran service officers](#). Fellow women veterans are available to help!

Our Veteran Service Offices, if desired, remain dedicated to serving your needs remotely. There are no benefits that require face to face interaction.

Our VSOs are trained and accredited by the US Department of Veterans' Affairs to provide free assistance to veterans and their dependents and survivors. This includes not only applying for federal and state benefits but also providing resources related to the following:

- **Compensation and Pension**
- **Health Care**
- **Education & Training**
- **Employment**
- **Burial & Survivor**
- **Housing**
- **Permits**
- **Military Records**
- **And more**

[Stand Up and Be Counted](#)

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs is here to help you navigate the many federal, state, and local resources and benefits available to veterans. Whether you have a specific question or would simply like us to help identify programs and benefits for which you may be eligible, our Veteran Service Officers are standing by to help.

By *Standing Up to Be Counted*, you will also be assisting your fellow veterans by helping

IDVA and the entire veteran advocacy community to gain a better understanding of whom and where Illinois' veterans are. This will help us plan for future services, lobby for further federal VA funding and facilities, and generally serve Illinois' veterans better. [Stand Up and Be Counted](#)
[VSO Directory](#)

Click the following .pdf for VSO phone Directory

- [VSO Directory](#)

[VSO Survey](#)

Our VSOs are dedicated professionals who would like your feedback to ensure that we are serving our veterans effectively, efficiently, and fairly. Please take a moment to complete the survey.

Source: <https://www.naco.org/articles/closer-look-role-county-veterans-service-officer>

A closer look at the role of the county veterans service officer

NOV 2, 2015

AUTHOR [Bev Schlotterbeck](#)

County veteran service officers are like prosecutors or defense attorneys. They're always building a case for their clients. That's how Jim Goltart, president of the NACo affiliate, the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers, NACVSO, sums up the mission of his association's members.

Three-quarters to 90 percent of the veterans' claims submitted for VA benefits come through a county veterans service office. The CVSOs are staffed by accredited veteran service officers, trained to navigate a bureaucracy nearly as complex as a military campaign.

They help veterans gather the necessary paperwork to support claims, file claims and assist in appealing claims that have been denied. It requires tenacity and passion, Goltart said.

He tells a story about a veteran who had served on a nuclear aircraft carrier. The man claimed radiation from the ship had caused his leukemia and had submitted a benefit claim to the VA. It was denied. He took the news to Goltart's office, which serves the

2,200 or so veterans in Le Sueur County, Minn. Golgart did some research on the causes of leukemia and among them found exposure to petroleum products as a suspect. The veteran, as it turned out, fueled the ship's planes.

Armed with this new information, Golgart helped him resubmit his claim. This time the claim was approved.

County veterans services offices are the at-home, back-to-the-community stop for veterans who have served the nation, fighting its wars and keeping its peace. They are the local link in an intergovernmental chain serving the country's 21.8 million veterans.

The county veterans service office stretches back to the Civil War, but really took off after World Wars I and II, he said. The offices exist at the county level, by statute, in more than half of the states. A dozen or so states do not have CVSOs, including the District of Columbia and Virginia, according to Jim Young, Vernon County, Wis. CVSO director and NACVSO immediate past president.

That doesn't mean there is no help for veterans. State regional veterans affairs offices and Veterans Service Organizations such as the VFW, American Legion and Amvets have VA-accredited service officers, but they are unlikely to know the community as well as a county-level officer would, and not be as facile at making connections with other nonprofit organizations in the community serving vets, Golgart said.

If a county is interested in opening its own CVSO, Golgart suggests the first steps involve a political commitment to fund the office, and a sweep of the veteran demographics in the county, including a review of the nonprofits already serving the veteran population.

In some states CVSOs are independent departments. In other states, they reside in the county health and human services department. Golgart said contacting his organization is a good way to start. It can recommend staffing levels, supply model job descriptions and address budgeting needs.

"We can help them get an idea about what's needed," he said.

To learn more, contact Golgart at jgolgart@co.le-sueur.mn.us or at 507.357.8279 or 507.420.1937.

National Association of County Veterans Service Officers can help

Source: By NACVSO Executive Board See: <http://nacvso.org/>

The National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO) exists to provide professional education, training and networking for the local county veteran service officers.

The association's efforts led to official recognition in April 1993 by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs "for the purpose of preparation, presentation, and prosecution of claims under laws administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs."

In other words, CVSOs accredited through NACVSO can now represent veterans in obtaining their federal VA benefits. In fact, several states require CVSOs to have NACVSO accreditation as a condition of employment.

County Veteran Service Offices are almost entirely funded by counties, despite the benefits work they engage in with the Department of Veterans Administration at the federal level.

CVSOs bring significant benefits to counties. In FY14, NACVSO-accredited members were directly responsible for more than \$28 billion in federal compensation and pension benefits being paid directly to veterans. They also helped veterans receive more than \$35 billion in health care and other benefits.

Currently, the NACVSO has accredited CVSOs in 29 states and accredited state service officers in six different states.

The startup cost for a local government to implement and maintain a veteran's service office would be based on several factors and can vary considerably. For smaller counties, it could be as little as \$100,000 in salaries and operating costs. A county with just over 50 veterans brings in almost \$1 million in benefits for those same 50 veterans, making the investment a sensible use of taxpayer dollars.

From its humble beginnings, the organization has grown to more than 1,800 members in 35 states and two Native-American tribes, all of whom work with more than 8.4 million U.S. veterans and their families.

-National Association of County Veterans Service Officers Board of Directors

For more information, visit NACVSO's website at <http://nacvso.org/>

TAGGED IN: [VETERANS AFFAIRS](#)

