



Board of County Commissioners Agenda Request

Requested Meeting Date: December 23, 2025

4A

Agenda Item #

Title of Item: Veteran Services Office Report

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> REGULAR AGENDA <input type="checkbox"/> CONSENT AGENDA	Action Requested: <input type="checkbox"/> Approve/Deny Motion <input type="checkbox"/> Adopt Resolution (attach draft) <input type="checkbox"/> Hold Public Hearing *provide copy of hearing notice that was published	<input type="checkbox"/> Direction Requested <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Discussion Item <input type="checkbox"/> Information Only
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Submitted by:
Penny Harms

Department:
Veterans Service

Presenter (Name and Title):
Penny Harms CVSO

Estimated Time Needed:
15 minutes

Summary of Issue:
Update on Veterans Service Office.

Alternatives, Options, Effects on Others/Comments:

Recommended Action/Motion:

Financial Impact:

Is there a cost associated with this request?

Yes

No

What is the total cost, with tax and shipping? \$

Is this budgeted?

Yes

No

Please Explain:

Veterans Service Office Report - December 2025

The number of Veterans living in Aitkin County in 2024 is approximately 1392.

- I. **Federal Benefits to Aitkin County Veterans FY 24:**
 - a. Compensation and Pension - **\$9,529,531**
 - b. Dependents Indemnity Compensation - **\$1,060,264**
 - c. Life Insurance paid out - **\$44,768**
 - d. **Federal VA \$s coming directly to veterans in Aitkin County = \$ 10,634,563**
 - e. Financial Breakdown for Aitkin County Veterans:
 - 105 veterans with 100% Service/Connected (S/C) receive over **\$5 million**.
 - 10% - 90% S/C veterans take in approximately **\$4 million**.
 - Benefit monies to surviving spouses and dependents is over **\$1 million**.
 - f. Medical Care to Aitkin County Veterans - **\$ 14,392,672**
 - Since the VA implemented the Veterans Community Care Program in 2019, a significant amount of this money goes to our local medical facilities.
 - **875** Aitkin County veterans received care at a VA Medical Center in 2024.
 - g. **Federal VA indirect expenditures to Aitkin County Vets for FY2024 = \$14,663,691**
 - h. **Total Federal expenditures to Aitkin County Veterans = \$25,298,254**
- II. **Veterans Services Office data – December 1, 2024 – November 30, 2025**
 - a. 500 office visits.
 - b. 255 outreach visits including McGregor, Hill City, Malmo and home visits.
 - c. 670 forms were completed and mailed to the VA.
 - d. 81 new clients were seen in our office.
 - e. 36 veterans enrolled in VA Medical Benefits for the first time.
 - f. 95 Aitkin County Veterans died in 2024 and 2025.
 - Amongst the 95 veterans lost were: 3 WWII veterans, 11 Korean War veterans, 41 Vietnam veterans, 39 who served during Peacetime and 1 Gulf War veteran.
 - We have 1 remaining WWII veteran in Aitkin County. He is 103 and still lives at home with his 93-year-old wife!
- III. **2024 Vet Van Statistics**
 - a. 65 trips were made to MPLS and St. Cloud VA Medical Centers with 67 veterans riding the van.
 - b. (Total Expenses) \$ 7,856 - (Reimbursements) \$2,728 = (Net expenses) \$5,127
- IV. **MN Department of Veterans Affairs State Soldier's Assistance Program (SSAP)** offers Dental, Optical, Subsistence, and Special Needs Grants to needy veterans and their families.

In 2024, 28 veterans and their family members benefitted from the SSAP program. Over \$13,000 was used for Special needs grants including making a bathroom handicap accessible for one disabled veteran and help with automobile adaptations for another disabled veteran. Remaining funds were used for routine dental care and eyeglasses. **Total to Aitkin County veterans in 2024 = \$29,476**
- V. **The CVSO Operational Improvement Grant** awards Aitkin County **\$10,000** each year to enhance the operations of the County Veterans Service Office. In FY 25, \$34500 was used for office supplies and equipment, \$3000 was spent on advertising including new business cards and a retractable banner, \$2950 was used for trainings and membership dues and \$400 for van repair.

Community Collaboration and other information

Aitkin County Veterans Service Organizations continue to keep us supplied with \$25 gas and grocery cards throughout the year along with bags of household supplies. We are able to give them to veterans as needed.

2024 Highlights (Donations for below received from Aitkin DAV, AL, VFW and their auxiliaries)

- 38 Gas Cards
- 20 Grocery Cards
- 9 Bags filled with Household Supplies
- 4 - \$500 gift cards for Christmas received from the AL riders

Aitkin County Veterans Office received **\$3500** in donations from various groups and community members this past year. Funds have been used for veterans for plumbing repair, MN ID, electric bills and other miscellaneous items that are not typically covered by other programs. Current Balance: **\$1683**.

Homeless and Wounded Warriors of MN is a non-profit organization that assists vets with financial needs. In the past year they have donated **\$11765** to help Aitkin County veterans by paying for the following:

Electric bills for 4 veterans -	\$1911
Special transportation -	\$597
Bed bug treatment -	\$2351
Well pump repair -	\$1471
Back taxes -	\$741
Auto repair for 2 vets -	\$1430
Past due mortgage -	\$3264

The Aitkin CVSO office collaborates with area organizations and agencies including Aitkin County H&HS, The Workforce Center, Aitkin County Homeless Coalition, HOPE, and Habitat for Humanity to help our veterans. Occasionally, we also assist veterans with applications for Food Stamps, Medical Assistance and Energy Assistance.

Josh and I have seen great improvements in how quickly claims and applications are being processed. Veterans used to wait months for disability decisions and now they are typically processed in 3 – 8 weeks. CHAMPVA applications used to take 6 months to process and now they are being completed in 3 weeks. The overall backlog of claims at the VA has been cut more than 50% since the first of the year.

With the elderly veteran population in Aitkin County, we are continually working to ensure they are using all of the resources available to them through the VA. It is the goal of the VA to keep veterans safe in their homes as long as possible. Veterans enrolled in VA health care can receive home care service, adult day care, ramps, medical supplies, assistive devices, hearing aids, etc. It is our job to support our veterans by ensuring they utilize all benefits available to them.

Thank you for allowing me to serve as the CVSO for Aitkin County.

Penny Harms
Aitkin CVSO