

U.S. Congresswoman  
**TAMMY DUCKWORTH**

Proudly Serving Illinois' 8th District



## Veterans Resource Guide

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Dear Returning Servicemembers, Veterans & families:

Welcome home. Thank you for your service to our nation.

When it comes to honoring and caring for Veterans and military families, we owe much more than the partisanship and gridlock we've become accustomed to in Washington. As a member of the House Armed Services Committee and a combat Veteran who served more than two decades in the Reserve Forces, I know firsthand the sacrifices Veterans make for our country. That's why I've made advocating for Veterans and their families my mission since recovering from my own wounds at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

Whether reducing VA wait times, increasing accountability and transparency, improving care or helping returning troops transition back into the civilian world, we should do everything we can to ensure that those who have sacrificed so much for us are treated with the respect and care they have earned. I will keep fighting for all Veterans, because they have fought for all of us.

That's one of the reasons my office compiled this resource packet: to help ease your transition to civilian life. Within this packet you can find information on the many resources and benefits available to you at both a local and federal level. I hope you find it beneficial.

If you have questions or concerns, please reach out to my office. For Veterans casework you can call my Illinois office at (847) 413-1959 and ask for Susan Giannone. For Veterans policy concerns, you can call my Washington D.C. office at (202) 225-3711 and ask to speak to my legislative team. I hope you will stay in touch with me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tammy Duckworth". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tammy Duckworth  
Member of Congress

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## Disclaimer

The purpose of this guide is to provide Veterans and servicemembers with an easy reference to federal and state resources that may help them better transition from military to civilian life. While this guide offers information on a number of resources, it is not intended to be comprehensive. Always check with your local VA office to ensure you are aware of all options available to you.

# Congresswoman Tammy Duckworth's Work on Behalf of Veterans

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Since recovering at Walter Reed, Congresswoman Tammy Duckworth has made serving Veterans her life's mission.

Before she arrived in Congress, she helped start the nation's first 24-hour hotline for Veterans in crisis as the Director of the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs—because PTSD symptoms and mental health issues don't only occur during business hours. She also worked to promote a business tax credit that encourages Illinois employers to hire returning Veterans and pushed to ensure that field officers actually got out from behind their desks and found Veterans who needed help, wherever they were in Illinois.

As an Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs, she coordinated the VA's joint initiative to end Veteran homelessness, because every American is dishonored when someone who fought for their freedom must lay his or her head down on the very streets they were defending. Though she is pleased that the number of homeless Veterans has dropped almost in half since the initiative began in 2009, she will not be satisfied until we reach our long-term goal of eradicating Veteran homelessness.

In Congress, she serves on the Armed Services Committee and the Oversight and Government Reform Committee, where she has introduced a number of bills aimed at improving quality of life and care for Veterans. Below is a snapshot of her work in Congress on behalf of Veterans.

## Constituent Services for Veterans and Their Families

Congresswoman Tammy Duckworth's office regularly helps constituents resolve specific casework issues with federal agencies and obtain information they are seeking about federal programs. While a favorable outcome is not guaranteed, her staff works hard to ensure constituents receive help whenever possible and a fair and timely response from federal agencies. Her office helps with a wide variety of claims for Veterans, including obtaining records and medals, assistance with healthcare and housing and help with military pensions, aid and attendance.

If you need help with Veterans casework, you can call our Illinois office at (847) 413-1959 and ask for Susan Giannone. In order to enable us to assist you with your case, you will be asked to fill out and sign the Privacy Act Release Form, which is located in Appendix 1.

Congresswoman Duckworth's office has also been working to make resources available to local Veterans and the organizations that serve them. For example, she brought U.S. Assistant

Secretary of Labor for Veterans' Employment and Training Michael Michaud to the Eighth District and [hosted a workshop with him in Elmhurst to help improve Veterans services](#) by ensuring non-profits and other organizations that serve Veterans have the resources, knowledge and expertise they need to accomplish their missions.

## Employment and Entrepreneurship

Though her Illinois Veteran hiring tax credit was a good start, Congresswoman Duckworth believes that we must do more to bring down the Veteran unemployment rate. To help returning troops transition into the workforce, she introduced the Troop Talent Act, which would make it easier for them to turn the skills they learned in the military into the credentials and licenses needed for jobs in similar civilian jobs. Much of this bill became law as part of the 2014 National Defense Authorization Act. It will improve the translation of military skill sets to civilian credentials or licenses and allow Military Tuition Assistance to be used on courses and programs that guarantee a credential or industry certification after successful completion.

She also introduced the Veterans Small Business Enhancement Act, which would allow Veteran-owned small businesses to apply for and receive government surplus property at no cost. This assistance would help Veteran-owned small businesses grow and hire more people while saving taxpayer money.

## Education

When Congress was considering cuts to Veterans' Post-9/11 GI Bill, Congresswoman Duckworth [spoke out against proposed cuts to Veterans' Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits and called on her colleagues to honor the promises made to the men and women who serve in our Armed Forces](#). After her efforts, negotiators significantly pared back the proposed cuts. The Post-9/11 GI Bill, one of the most significant Veterans bills Congress has passed in a generation, provides Veterans with important education benefits including a housing allowance and enables Veterans to transfer that allowance to their family members. If the proposed cuts had become law, those benefits would have been cut in half if a Veteran parent transferred them to their children—breaking a solemn promise Congress made to our nation's servicemembers and military families.

Together with Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL), Congresswoman Duckworth introduced the Servicemember Student Loan Affordability Act, which would enable pre-service private or federal student loan debt to be consolidated or refinanced. This allows servicemembers with Federal Family Education Loans or Perkins student loans to enroll in the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program while they are serving and can still take advantage of the 6% rate cap under the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA).

## Health

In the United States today, there are only two classes of individuals forced to pay out-of-pocket copays for essential preventive health services and medications: the uninsured and certain Veterans. Congresswoman Duckworth introduced the Veterans Preventive Health Coverage Fairness Act to fix this problem and ensure Veterans are provided vital preventive health services cost-free, just as we currently provide for servicemembers enrolled in TRICARE and all other insured individuals.

In order to help address major problems with care and long wait times that were being covered up at VA facilities around the country, the Congresswoman supported the Veterans' Access to Care through Choice, Accountability, and Transparency Act that passed into law in 2014. This law provided \$10 billion to allow Veterans to seek private medical care if they have unreasonable wait times as well as additional medical staff and leases for 27 medical facilities across the country. She also voted to pass the Surface Transportation and Veterans Health Care Choice Improvement Act, which averted a devastating \$2.6 billion budget shortfall in the VA and encouraged the agency to implement reforms that consolidate all non-VA care into a single Veterans Choice Program.

She also introduced the bipartisan MEMORY Act to make it easier for Veterans to claim benefits for treatment of mental health injuries and traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) related to their deployments. And she is a proud cosponsor of the bipartisan Fairness for Veterans Act, which would protect our heroes from being needlessly and unfairly denied healthcare and other benefits because of behavior tied to their service-related injuries.

## Veteran Suicide

The Congresswoman co-introduced the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans (Clay Hunt SAV) Act with Representatives Tim Walz (D-MN) and Jeff Miller (R-FL), because not every battle wound is as obvious as hers are, and with more than 2 million post-9/11 Veterans in America, we must remember that invisible wounds require care without stigma or judgment as well. President Obama signed this bill into law in February 2015. It will increase access to mental healthcare services at VA facilities as well as improve capacity and quality while boosting accountability.

This law establishes a pilot program that will require an annual evaluation of the quality of mental care for Veterans, provides assistance to transitioning servicemembers through a peer support and community outreach pilot program, requires the VA to create a one-stop, interactive website to serve as a centralized source of information for all mental health services for Veterans and increases the pipeline of qualified mental health professionals for the VA by creating a student loan repayment pilot program for psychiatry.

## Financial Security

A Duckworth provision to remove language in the National Defense Authorization Act that would have delayed protections for servicemembers against predatory lending practices [was one of the few Democratic amendments to pass](#) the House Armed Services Committee in 2015. The Congresswoman [sent a letter with 53 of her colleagues](#) to the Department of Defense (DoD) calling for increased protections for members of the military from high cost loans. In response, [DoD proposed a rule in 2014](#) to extend Military Lending Act protections to all forms of credit targeting members of the military. Without Duckworth's amendment, this vital military consumer protection initiative would have been unnecessarily delayed for up to a year.

Congresswoman Duckworth also introduced the [Military Consumer Protection Act](#), which would empower the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) to defend our servicemembers from unscrupulous actors in the consumer financial marketplace.

## Oversight

When it came to light that unscrupulous individuals could game the system to take advantage of federal benefits intended for our Veterans, making it harder for those who deserve these benefits to actually receive them, Congresswoman Duckworth reached across the aisle with House Oversight and Government Reform Chairman Darrell Issa (R-CA) to introduce the SERV Act. Their bipartisan legislation would better protect Veterans from this type of fraud and abuse by ensuring that benefits reserved for Veterans can no longer be claimed by individuals who have never actually served in the Armed Forces.

She is also working to support Veterans by helping improve transparency and accountability at all levels of the VA and making sure whistleblowers are protected from retaliation. She supported legislation that would strengthen whistleblower protections, help address the VA claims backlog and make it easier to hold VA employees who have wronged Veterans accountable for misconduct or failure to provide proper care.

After working diligently to fix issues and problems she first raised with VA leadership in 2013, Duckworth met face-to-face with VA Secretary Robert McDonald and urged him to swiftly and comprehensively address allegations of long wait times, substandard care and whistleblower retaliation at the Hines VA Hospital, where she still receives her own health care services. She also secured the Secretary's commitment to prioritize his search for a permanent director empowered to fix problems at Hines, which had been without senior leadership for nearly two years. Just weeks after her request, a new permanent director for the hospital was announced.

## Military Families

The bipartisan [Military Spouses' Achieving College Education for Survivors \(ACES\) Act](#), which Congresswoman Duckworth introduced with Congressman Scott Rigell (R-VA), passed both

the House of Representatives and Senate as part of a broad legislative package. This bipartisan legislation would provide spouses whose husband or wife died in the line of duty after September 11, 2001 the time they need to use the full 36-month Fry Scholarship benefit without fear of it being cut short halfway through their educational pursuits.

In 2014, Duckworth offered a provision to the National Defense Authorization Act directing the DoD to begin collecting and tracking information on the number of military dependents that attempt suicide as part of the Department's larger suicide awareness and prevention efforts.

# U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Resources

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The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is the central location for your interactions with the government and for obtaining benefits post-separation from the military. The quickest way to receive service is by filing a fully developed claim. During this process, you provide pertinent information to VA so that you can get the care you need.

## Veterans Health Administration (VHA)

VA Health Benefits include all the necessary inpatient hospital care and outpatient services to promote, preserve, or restore your health. Veterans Health Administration (VHA) medical facilities provide a wide range of services including traditional hospital-based services such as surgery, critical care, mental health, orthopedics, pharmacy, radiology and physical therapy. To learn about your health benefits options, visit [http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/access/medical\\_benefits\\_package.asp](http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/access/medical_benefits_package.asp) or to apply for benefits, visit <http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/apply/>.

## Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC)

The VA currently has over 800 Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC). The VHA operates these clinics to make access to health care easier. These clinics provide the most common outpatient services, including health and wellness visits, without the hassle of visiting a larger medical center. VHA continues to expand their network of CBOCs to include more rural locations, bringing access to care closer to home. To find a CBOC nearest to you please visit <http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/>.

## Vet Centers

Unlike a VA Hospital or CBOC, Vet Centers can serve Veterans regardless of discharge status. Vet Centers across the country provide a broad range of counseling, outreach and referral services to combat Veterans and their families. Vet Centers guide Veterans and their families through many of the major adjustments in lifestyle that often occur after a Veteran returns from combat. Services for a Veteran may include individual and group counseling in areas such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), alcohol and drug assessment and suicide prevention referrals. All services are free of cost and are strictly confidential. To find a Vet Center near you, visit <http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/>.

## Burial Benefits

Veterans, Active Duty servicemembers and retired Reservists and National Guard servicemembers are eligible for an inscribed headstone or marker for their unmarked grave at

any cemetery — national, state veterans, tribal, or private. VA will deliver a headstone or marker at no cost, anywhere in the world. To learn about all burial benefits, visit [http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/benefits\\_book/benefits\\_chap08.asp](http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/benefits_book/benefits_chap08.asp).

### **National Guard Benefits**

National Guard members performing active service where pay is received from the Federal government may qualify for many VA benefits. This could be active duty under Title 10 or full-time National Guard duty under Title 32, to include performing full-time duties as an Active Guard Reserve member. Learn more about your Active National Guard VA benefits, such as Education, Home Loans, Disability Compensation, and Pension here: <http://www.benefits.va.gov/GUARDRESERVE/active-reserve.asp>.

# Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) Resources

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To assist Veterans in navigating the complex web of services and benefits available, the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) runs 49 full-time and 35 part-time offices across the State of Illinois. These offices are staffed by more than 60 individual Veteran Service Officers (VSOs) and fellow Veterans who are experts on federal, state and local Veteran resources.

## Veteran Service Officers (VSOs)

The IDVA VSOs are trained and accredited by the U.S. 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
- Transportation
- Military Records

To find a VSO nearest you, visit <http://www.illinois.gov/veterans/Pages/ServiceOffices.aspx> or see Appendix 2 at the end of this document.

## Veterans Homes

There are four Veterans' Homes in Illinois that provide quality long-term skilled care and services to resident members. Each home is licensed by the Illinois Department of Public Health and certified by the U.S Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center of jurisdiction. The Homes work closely with the local healthcare community to ensure that each resident's specific health care needs are available and met. You can find full addresses for each home in Appendix 2. You can find more information by visiting, <http://www.illinois.gov/veterans/homes/Pages/default.aspx>.

## Military Records

Veterans and their families may obtain one full set of the Veteran's military awards and decorations free of charge. Your local State of Illinois Veteran Service Officer can help. Apply here: <https://www.illinois.gov/veterans/programs/Pages/MilitaryRecords.aspx>.

# Key Federal Benefits for Veterans

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There are a variety of benefits available to you and your family through the VA and keeping track of them can be a challenge. Below, we outline some of the most important benefits for you through the VA and how you can access them. For any benefit, the most productive way to apply for benefits is by working with a patient advocate at your regional VA office. Patient advocates are experts in Veteran benefits and can help you navigate the system and provide information on benefit wait times, appeals or any other questions.

For any additional questions about benefits or how to apply, you can also reach out to our office at (847) 413-1959 and ask to speak to the Congresswoman's Casework Director and Veterans specialist, Susan Giannone.

## Post 9/11 GI Bill

The Post-9/11 GI Bill provides up to 36 months of education benefits, generally payable for 15 years following your release from active duty. The GI Bill Calculator can be found here: <http://newgibill.org/calculator/>.

You also have the option to transfer the unused portion of your GI bill to your spouse or children if the Department of Defense determines they are eligible. You must designate your beneficiaries while still in the military. Once you separate from the service you can shift allocations amongst beneficiaries but you may not add new beneficiaries. Additional eligibility criteria can be found here: [http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/post911\\_transfer.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/post911_transfer.asp).

You can apply for your GI Bill benefits online at <http://www.gibill.va.gov/apply-for-benefits/>.

## Transitional Assistance Management Program (TAMP)

TAMP provides you with 180 days of premium-free health care benefits during your transition after regular TRICARE benefits expire. Although TAMP is temporary, it is considered the minimum essential coverage that is required under the Affordable Care Act. Some family members may be covered as well if they qualify under TAMP criteria. For eligibility concerns and more information, visit <http://www.tricare.mil/Plans/SpecialPrograms/TAMP>.

To apply for your TAMP benefits you can visit any VA regional office and apply in person with a patient advocate or you can apply online by completing the 10-10EZ form online here [http://www.va.gov/vaforms/form\\_detail.asp?FormNo=10EZ](http://www.va.gov/vaforms/form_detail.asp?FormNo=10EZ).

Should you have any questions about the application, please feel free to reach out to our office at (847) 413-1959 and ask to speak to our Veterans caseworker.

## **Veterans Education Assistance Program (VEAP)**

VEAP benefits are available to Veterans who elected to make contributions to the program from their active duty military pay. The government matches your contributions at a 2-1 ratio if you paid into the program. It expires 10 years from date of last discharge or release from active duty.

To apply your VEAP benefits, you must complete VA Form 22-1990 and send it to the VA regional office with jurisdiction to the state you reside in. You can visit a regional VA office and speak with a patient advocate for help applying or visit the VA VEAP page here for more information, <http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/veap.asp>.

## **Montgomery GI Bill for Active-Duty (MGIB)**

Also known as “Chapter 30” this education benefit provides Veterans who completed two years of active duty with up to 36 months of stipends that can be applied to education courses and on-the-job training certificates in addition to your GI Bill benefits. Typically this benefit expires 10 years from date of last discharge or release from active duty but can vary based on your situation. To view current MGIB rates, visit [http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/mgib\\_ad.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/mgib_ad.asp).

To apply for MGIB benefits, you can visit any VA regional office and apply in person with a patient advocate or you can apply online by completing the Veterans Online Application (VONAPP), which can be accessed at <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/vonapp>.

## **Montgomery GI Bill for Selected Reserve (MGIB-SR)**

Similar to the MGIB for active duty Veterans, this education benefit is available to members of the Selected Reserve, including the Army Reserve, Navy Reserve, Air Force Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve and Coast Guard Reserve, and the Army National Guard and the Air National Guard. It expires 14 years from the date of eligibility for the program, or until released from the Selected Reserve or National Guard. Some extensions are available if activated.

You can apply for MGIB-SR benefits by completing DD Form 2384-1 and sending it to the VA regional office with jurisdiction for your state. For more information and to download the relevant form, visit [http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/mgib\\_sr.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/mgib_sr.asp).

## **Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VocRehab)**

VocRehab services are available through the VA to assist Veterans in their employment search. The program provides job search preparation, training and coaching. Generally it is available to Veterans for 12 years from separation from service or within 12 years of being awarded service-connected VA disability compensation.

You can apply for VocRehab benefits by completing VA Form 28-1900 and sending it to the relevant VA regional office with jurisdiction over your state. Additionally, you can apply online at <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/homepage>.

### **Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI)**

Coverage ends 120 days after separation or can be extended up to 1 year for totally disabled Veterans.

SGLI is automatic and you do not need to apply for it. For more information or to designate beneficiaries, you can visit <http://www.benefits.va.gov/insurance/>.

### **Veterans Group Life Insurance (VGLI)**

This program allows the conversion of SGLI coverage to those discharged from service. You must roll over your SGLI to VGLI within 120 days of discharge to be eligible. Coverage rates will increase compared to SGLI.

To apply for VGLI, you must complete the SGLV 8714 form and mail your application to:

OSGLI  
PO Box 41618  
Philadelphia, PA 19176-9913

Or you can apply online through <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/>.

### **Aid and Attendance (A&A)**

The Aid and Attendance (A&A) Special Pension is a benefit paid in addition to a Veteran's monthly pension that is available to help offset some of the costs of nursing homes, assisted living communities, personal care homes or homecare expenses. Married Veterans are eligible for up to \$2,085/month, single Veterans up to \$1,758/month and widow/ers of Veterans up to \$1,130/month. It is available to the Veteran, spouse or widow/er who served at least ninety days of active service, one of which was during wartime (including those who served stateside). Eligible Veterans must have been honorably discharged.

To apply for A&A you can visit your regional VA office work with a patient advocate. Otherwise, you must complete VA Form 21-527EZ and submit it to the Pension Management Center that serves your state. You can find the relevant Patient Management Center and download the form by visiting, <http://www.benefits.va.gov/PENSION/resources-contact.asp>.

### **Family Caregiver Program (FCP)**

Through the FCP eligible post-9/11 Veterans will have the option to receive their care in a home setting from a primary Family Caregiver. Veterans can download a copy of the Family Caregiver program application (VA CG 10-10) at [www.caregiver.va.gov](http://www.caregiver.va.gov). The application

enables the Veteran to designate a primary Family Caregiver and secondary Family Caregivers if needed. Caregiver Support Coordinators are stationed at every VA medical center and via phone at 1(877) 222 VETS (8387) to assist Veterans and their Family Caregivers with the application process.

# Housing and Homelessness

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Veterans face homelessness at a higher rate than the general population of the United States and while the rate of Veteran homelessness has declined in recent years, there is still much to be done. Servicemembers transitioning out of the military are offered an overview of some of the resources available; however, all Veterans and servicemembers would be wise to stay up to date on the housing options available to them through the VA, IDVA and other local programs. A few key services are outlined below; however, this list is not a comprehensive overview of all the programs available to Veterans.

## Housing Choice Voucher Program

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)–VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Program is a joint effort between HUD and VA to move Veterans and their families out of homelessness and into permanent housing. HUD provides housing assistance through its Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8) that allows homeless Veterans to rent privately owned housing. Visit <http://www.va.gov/homeless/hud-vash.asp> to learn more.

## VA Home Loans

The VA provides servicemembers, Veterans and eligible surviving spouses with home loan guaranty benefit and other housing-related programs to help buy, build, repair, retain or adapt a home. VA Home Loans are provided by private lenders, such as banks and mortgage companies. VA guarantees a portion of the loan, enabling the lender to provide you with more favorable terms. Visit <http://www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans/> to learn more.

## Veteran Resource Center

HUD sponsors the Veteran Resource Center (HUDVET), which works with national Veterans service organizations to serve as a general information center on all HUD-sponsored housing and community development programs and services. To contact HUDVET, call (877) 424-3838, TDD 1-(800) 483- 2209, or visit [www.hud.gov/hudvet](http://www.hud.gov/hudvet).

## Armed Forces Retirement Homes

Veterans are eligible to live in the Armed Forces Retirement Homes located in Gulfport, Miss., or Washington, D.C., if their active duty military service is at least 50 percent enlisted (other than warrant officers). Additionally Veterans must meet the following conditions.

- Are 60 years of age or older; and were discharged or released under honorable conditions after 20 or more years of active service.
- Served in a war theater during a time of war declared by Congress or were eligible for hostile-fire special pay and were discharged or released under honorable conditions;

and are determined to be incapable of earning a livelihood because of injuries, disease or disability.

- Served in a women's component of the armed forces before June 12, 1948; and are determined to be eligible for admission due to compelling personal circumstances.
- Veterans are not eligible if they have been convicted of a felony or are not free from alcohol, drug or psychiatric problems. Married couples are welcome, but both must be eligible in their own right.

At the time of admission, applicants must be capable of living independently. The Armed Forces Retirement Home is an independent federal agency. For information, call 1-800-332-3527 or 1(800) 422-9988, or visit [www.afrh.gov/](http://www.afrh.gov/).

### **IDVA Veterans Homes**

There are four Veterans' Homes in Illinois that provide quality long-term skilled care and services to resident members. Each home is licensed by the Illinois Department of Public Health and certified by the federal VA Medical Center of jurisdiction. The Homes work closely with the local healthcare community to ensure that each resident's specific health care needs are available and met. You can find full addresses for each home in Appendix 2. For more information, visit <http://www.illinois.gov/veterans/homes/Pages/default.aspx>

### **County Veterans Assistance Commissions (VAC)**

County Veterans Assistance Commissions (VACs) have limited rent and sustenance emergency funds. Check the status of your county at one of the following links:

- Cook: <http://www.vaccook.org/#!mortgagerent/c1dy6>
- DuPage: <http://bit.ly/1axfQeN>
- Kane: [www.goo.gl/OOsZp6](http://www.goo.gl/OOsZp6)

### **Veterans Pantry**

Jesse Brown VA and Hines VA host a Veterans pantry that is a collaboration between the Greater Chicago Food Depository, the hospital and AmeriCorps. The pantry distributes fresh produce and shelf-stable items every Tuesday from 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. You can learn more about the pantry at [www.chicagosfoodbank.org](http://www.chicagosfoodbank.org)

# Education

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One of the strongest tools that Veterans have after completing their service is access to numerous education, job training and educational assistance resources that can often be utilized by both the Veteran and their family. Below, we outline a few of the major sources for education benefits; however, this is not a comprehensive list and interested Veterans should consult the VA's website and their local Veterans Assistance Commission for more information regarding education benefits and resources.

## Post 9/11 GI Bill

The Post-9/11 GI Bill provides up to 36 months of education benefits, generally payable for 15 years following your release from active duty. The GI Bill can be applied to college classes or on-the-job training programs.

The GI Bill Comparison Tool can help you learn what programs are eligible for the GI Bill and can help maximize the benefits you are entitled to. To use the GI Bill Comparison Tool, visit <https://www.vets.gov/gi-bill-comparison-tool>.

In addition to using credits yourself, you also have the option to transfer the unused portion of your GI bill to your spouse or children if the Department of Defense determines they are eligible. To read the criteria for transferring benefits, visit [http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/post911\\_transfer.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/post911_transfer.asp).

## Illinois Veteran Grant (IVG) Program

The Illinois Veteran Grant (IVG) Program pays tuition and certain fees at all Illinois state-supported colleges, universities and community colleges for Illinois residents. If you have served at least one year of federal Active Duty service; or served on federal active duty service in a foreign country during a time of hostilities in that country and were honorably discharged or are currently serving, you may be eligible. Click [www.isac.org](http://www.isac.org) to apply by completing a FAFSA form.

- The University of Illinois offers a select amount of tuition waivers and fee waivers for children of Veterans. To apply for this scholarship, visit <https://osfa.illinois.edu/types-of-aid/children-of-veterans-tuition-waiver>.

# Mental Health Resources

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Veterans face a myriad of complex emotional and psychological issues during their training, service and after exiting the military. No two Veterans will handle these situations the same way, which is why Congresswoman Duckworth has spent much of her time in Congress making sure that Veterans have access to a continuum of quality mental health services.

## Veterans Crisis Line

Suicide is a tragic issue that affects numerous Veterans and catching suicidal impulses early is of the utmost importance. If you or someone you know is having suicidal thoughts, please contact the Vets Crisis line at 1-888-273-TALK. You can also chat with someone online at <http://www.veteranscrisisline.net/ChatTermsOfService.aspx>.

## Behavioral Health Treatment Services

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) provides a free online tool that enables anyone to locate various mental health services in any given area. The Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator covers a wide range of services and issue areas from PTSD to substance abuse to peer support groups. This confidential and anonymous source will not collect or maintain any personal information provided. To access the Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator, visit <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>.

## National Resource Directory

The National Resource Directory (NRD) is a U.S. government interagency effort, spearheaded by the Department of Defense, Department of Labor and VA, to support servicemembers and Veterans in all of their healthcare needs. NRD aggregates information related to programs, resources and benefits available to Veterans across the three aforementioned Departments. You can access the NRD by visiting, <http://www.nrd.gov/>.

## Vet Centers

Unlike a VA Hospital or CBOC, Vet Centers can serve Veterans regardless of discharge status. Vet Centers across the country provide a broad range of counseling, outreach, and referral services to combat Veterans and their families. Vet Centers guide Veterans and their families through many of the major adjustments in lifestyle that often occur after a Veteran returns from combat. Services for a Veteran may include individual and group counseling in areas such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), alcohol and drug assessment, and suicide prevention referrals. All services are free of cost and are strictly confidential. To find a Vet Center near you, visit <http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/vetcenter.asp?isFlash=0>.

# Employment Resources for Veterans

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Those who have risked life and limb to protect our freedom deserve the opportunity to get a good job when they return home, and we must do more to help our servicemen and women more easily transition into employment upon returning from duty. Between federal, state and local governments there are numerous resources available to recent Veterans of all ages. A few key services are outlined below; however, this list is not a comprehensive overview of all the programs available to Veterans.

## Veteran Employment and Training Service (VETS)

The U.S. Department of Labor sponsors several different employment, training and education programs through their new [Vets.gov](https://www.vets.gov) website.

## Veteran Employment Service Offices (VESO)

The Veteran Employment Services Office (VESO) is a VA office that focuses on recruiting, retaining and supporting Veteran employees at the VA. VESO oversees numerous innovative programs and services that support Veteran employment at the VA and the federal government. For an overview of all the VESO services, visit <http://vaforvets.va.gov/veso/Pages/default.asp>

- **VA for Vets** is a program that understands that Veterans have a unique understanding of the role that the VA plays in the lives of servicemembers and Veterans. This recruitment, training and hiring program encourages Veterans to continue serving their country by working directly in the VA system. For more information about VA for Vets, visit <http://vaforvets.va.gov/JobSeekers/work-for-va/Pages/Work-For-VA.asp>
- **Feds Hire Vets** is a Veteran employment resource center for all Federal government agencies to post employment opportunities, training services and other valuable information for Veteran focused careers. For more information about Feds Hire Vets, visit <https://www.fedshirevets.gov/>
- **Veteran Employment Specialists** are employment and HR professionals available to Veterans to provide one-on-one assistance for Veterans seeking employment or employers looking to hire. They are located at regional Veteran Integrated Service Networks (VISN) offices throughout the country. To find your local representative and learn more, visit <http://vaforvets.va.gov/hr/RVECS/pages/rvecs-map.asp>
- **Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E)** is a program designed to help servicemembers, Veterans and dependents receive individualized career counseling and maximize their use of benefits available through the VA. For more information, visit [http://www.benefits.va.gov/VOCREHAB/edu\\_voc\\_counseling.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/VOCREHAB/edu_voc_counseling.asp)

## Transition Assistance Program

The **Transition Assistance Program (TAP)** is a federal government initiative to provide comprehensive transition services to servicemembers preparing to exit the military. On a space-available basis, retirees, spouses and dependents age 16-26 may also utilize these services. Non-retiree Veterans, and their dependents, can access TAP up to 180 days after separation. All transitioning servicemembers interact with TAP. Federal agencies like the Department of Labor, the VA and the Department of Defense provide curriculums to military members to help them understand their benefits and all of the resources available to them after exiting the service. To learn more about TAP, visit <https://www.dodtap.mil/>.

## State of Illinois Veterans Employment Services

The Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) manages several programs to help Veterans find gainful employment after transitioning from service. Veterans can utilize training workshops specific to Veterans that are run out of the nearly 40 IDES offices throughout the State. To learn more about the programs available through IDES, visit [http://www.ides.illinois.gov/Pages/Veteran\\_Services.aspx](http://www.ides.illinois.gov/Pages/Veteran_Services.aspx).

## U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Loans

USDA provides loans and guaranties to Veterans buy, improve or operate farms. These are generally available to those returning to or looking to move to towns with a population of 20,000 or less. For more information, contact Farm Service Agency or Rural Development, USDA, 1400 Independence Ave., S.W., Washington, DC 20250, or apply at local Department of Agriculture office.

# Entrepreneurship Resources

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The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) provides numerous programs, loans, training assistance and other valuable services specifically designed to support Veteran entrepreneurs. A specialized Veterans Business Development Officer is located at every SBA location and will be on hand to guide you through any of the programs mentioned below or many of the other great resources offered by the SBA that are not exclusive to Veterans. To schedule an appointment at your local SBA office or learn more, visit <https://www.sba.gov/>

- The **Office of Veterans Business Development (OVBD)** is the SBA office that oversees all of the Veteran specific entrepreneurial programs. They offer dozens of small business development resources beyond what is mentioned in this guide. To learn more and find the program that best suits your needs visit <https://www.sba.gov/offices/headquarters/ovbd>.
- **Veterans Business Outreach Centers (VBOC)** are SBA funded locations run by independent nonprofit organizations that specialize in Veterans business counseling. There are VBOCs located throughout the country that offer workshops, training, individualized advising and other services. VBOCs specialize in helping Veterans launch businesses and develop five-year business plans. The VBOC that serves Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota is located in Chicago. To learn more about the VBOC program, visit <http://www.vbocwbdc.org/>.
- **SCORE Association** is a SBA-sponsored nonprofit organization consisting of thousands of volunteer mentors. SCORE mentors are trained as small business advisors and are available for one-on-one and group as no cost to aspiring small business owners. Many SCORE chapters have Veteran counselor on hand to provide unique insight into the advantages of being a Veteran entrepreneur. To learn more, visit <https://www.score.org/>.
- **Lending Programs** and loan services are offered by the SBA. There are several Veteran-specific programs like the Patriot Express Pilot Loan and the 3 percent federal procurement goal specifically for service-connected disabled Veteran entrepreneurs. Beyond those targeted programs, Veterans may be able to qualify for several other types of Small Business Loans. To learn more about SBA lending, visit <https://www.sba.gov/loans-grants>

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*Small Business Administration  
Illinois District Office  
500 W. Madison Street, Suite 1150  
Chicago, IL  
312-353-4528*

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# Resources for Employers Looking to Hire Veterans

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Through military service, Veterans pick up a unique set of work ethic and leadership skills that often cannot be developed in other settings. Private companies often realize that placing a focus on hiring Veterans can help grow their organization because they will be adding hardworking, dependable and well-trained employees to their workforce. For private companies looking to hire Veterans, there are several resources available and a few of them are outlined below.

## **Veteran Employment Specialists (VES)**

The VA runs the VES program which offers employment specialists who can help businesses find Veteran talent to meet the needs of your business. They are located in regional offices throughout the country. To learn more and find your relevant office, visit

<http://vaforvets.va.gov/hr/RVECS/Pages/rvecs-map.asp>

## **Veteran Tax Credit for Employers**

Illinois employers can now earn a State income tax credit of up to \$5,000 annually for hiring Veterans of Operation Desert Storm, Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom. The credit is 10 percent of the total wages paid to every qualified Veteran hired after January 1, 2010. Veterans must work at least 185 days during the tax year for the employer to qualify for the Veteran's Tax Credit. To learn more, visit:

[http://www.ides.illinois.gov/Pages/Tax\\_Credit\\_Programs.aspx](http://www.ides.illinois.gov/Pages/Tax_Credit_Programs.aspx).

## **Department of Labor - Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS)**

The mission of the Department of Labor's VETS program is to "prepare America's veterans, service members and their spouses, for meaningful careers, provide them with employment resources and expertise, protect their employment rights and promote their employment opportunities." In addition to helping individual Veterans find employment, the VETS program office also provides valuable hiring resources for private companies who are looking to find qualified Veterans. The program office provides an employer-toolkit which is designed to assist and educate employers in their recruitment and hiring initiatives. They also offer information on registering apprenticeships and material to help ensure you're complying with Veteran employment rights and policies. To learn more about employer resources to hire Veterans, visit <https://www.dol.gov/vets/hire/index.htm>.

# Legal Aid

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The federal government makes a promise to all Veterans and servicemembers to provide care for all individuals who serve our country through military service. Unfortunately, the complex network of agencies and individuals involved in the delivery of that care can sometimes result in a breakdown or failure to deliver. If you experience this situation and are unable to access benefits you are entitled to, there are free legal aid services available to you.

## **National Veterans Law Service Program**

National Veterans Law Service Program offers free legal aid to Veterans. They can be reached at (202) 265-8305 or at P.O. Box 65762, Washington, DC 20035.

# Transportation and Disability Services

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Many Veterans, through the consequences of military service or through the natural aging process, will inevitably face mobility issues. Mobility and access to transportation are key to the ability to maintain independence and retain employment. Veterans deserve an adequate helping hand when they need one. Below is an example of both a transportation and disability resource open to Veterans.

## County Veterans Assistance Commissions (VACs)

Veterans Assistance Commissions in each county are dedicated to the assistance and support of Illinois Veterans. They are designed to provide needed services, including financial aid, Veteran services, transportation and advocacy services to military Veterans and their families that reside in each county. Contact your county's VAC at one of the following links:

- Cook: <http://www.vaccook.org/>
- DuPage: <http://bit.ly/1axfOeN>
- Kane: [www.goo.gl/OQsZp6](http://www.goo.gl/OQsZp6)

# Resources for Female Veterans

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Female Veterans can face unique challenges and they have access to individualized care programs to fit their needs. Below is a sampling of those programs; it is not a comprehensive list of all the resources available to female Veterans.

## VA Health Care for Female Veterans

At each VA medical center nationwide, a Women Veterans Program Manager (WVPM) is designated to advise and advocate for female Veterans. The WVPM can help coordinate all the services you may need, from primary care to specialized care for chronic conditions or reproductive health. Female Veterans who are interested in receiving care at VA can contact the nearest VA Medical Center and ask for the WVPM if they would like to learn about the services available to them.

## VA Benefits for Victims of Military Sexual Trauma

The VA has special services available to help men and women who experienced Military Sexual Trauma (MST), including free, confidential counseling and treatment for mental and physical health conditions related to MST. You do not need to have a service-connected disability or injury, and may be able to receive this benefit even if you are not eligible for other VA care. You do not need to have reported the incidents when they happened or have other documentation that they occurred in order to receive MST services.

Every VA facility has a designated MST Coordinator who serves as a contact person for MST-related issues. This person is your advocate and can help you find and access VA services and programs, state and federal benefits, and community resources. You can learn more about these resources at [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp). At Hines VA, the Military Sexual Trauma coordinator is Kristin Lopez. She can be reached at (708) 202-4718. At Jesse Brown VA, the Military Sexual Trauma coordinator is Jenny Garretson. She can be reached at (312) 287-0154.

# Additional Resources

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## Naturalization Preference

Honorable active duty service in the U.S. armed forces during a designated period of hostility allows an individual to naturalize without being required to establish any periods of residence or physical presence in the United States. A servicemember who was in the United States, certain territories or aboard an American public vessel at the time of enlistment, re-enlistment, extension of enlistment or induction, may naturalize even if he or she is not a lawful permanent resident. Additional information about filing and requirement fees and designated periods of hostility are available on the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website at <http://www.uscis.gov/>.

For additional information, USCIS has developed a web page, <https://www.uscis.gov/military> that contains information and links to services specifically for the military and their families. Members of the U.S. military and their families stationed around the world can also call USCIS for help with immigration services and benefits using a dedicated, toll-free help line at 1(877) CIS-4MIL (1(877) 247-4645).

## Community Partners

There are many organizations in our communities committed to helping Veterans succeed. Be wary of organizations that are not fully developed or vetted by the already-established Veteran Service Organizations, as there are many deceptive organizations claiming to help Veterans in our country. For a comprehensive list of Congressionally-chartered Veteran Service Organizations, visit <http://veterans.house.gov/citizens/resources>.

# Grant Resources Available for Veteran Services

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The Office of Congresswoman Duckworth has a full time grants coordinator on staff to assist you with your grant application process, letters of support and other materials pertaining to grants. If you are interested in a letter of support or guidance on the grants process, please contact Dan McManus, Outreach and Grants Coordinator at (847) 413-1959. He will be happy to assist you.

## Grants.gov

A federal grant website offering numerous opportunities to organizations, cities, states, and individuals, visit [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) and type in keyword "Veterans."

## VA Homeless Providers Grant & Per Diem Program

A [federal program](#) that assists public and non-profit private entities in establishing programs and service centers to provide supportive services and housing for homeless Veterans.

## Veterans Cash

Veterans Cash is a lottery program which has funded programs for Veterans throughout Illinois. Learn more here: <http://www.illinois.gov/veterans/programs/Pages/veterans-cash.aspx>

## Appendix 1: Privacy Act Release Form

The Privacy Act of 1974 prohibits the disclosure of personal information without that individual's consent. In order to open a case on your behalf please complete this form and return it to my Congressional District Office. The form can also be accessed on line at: [http://duckworth.house.gov/images/pdf/2015\\_farf.pdf](http://duckworth.house.gov/images/pdf/2015_farf.pdf).

Please include copies of any relevant documents.

Title: \_\_\_\_\_ First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. # \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Other Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_  
Social Security Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_  
Alien Registration Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Veteran's Claim Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Military I.D. Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Branch of Service: \_\_\_\_\_ Dates of Service: \_\_\_\_\_  
Other case or claim number(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Briefly explain your problem or the information you are requesting:

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I agree to allow Congresswoman Tammy Duckworth to access any records relating to the problem described above.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this signed form by mail, fax or email to: Office of Congresswoman Tammy Duckworth  
1701 E. Woodfield Rd., Ste. 704  
Schaumburg, IL 60173  
Fax: (847)413-1965  
Email: DOInfo.Tammy@mail.house.gov  
For questions, please call the district office at (847) 413-1959. Thank you.

## Appendix 2: Veteran Service Officers in the 8<sup>th</sup> District and IL Veteran Homes

### Cook County - James R. Thompson Center

James R. Thompson Center 100 W Randolph Suite 5-570 Chicago, IL 60601 VSO: Cynthia Green  
Ph: (312) 814-3326 Hours: 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM (Daily) Female Service Officer Available

### Cook County

Schaumburg Township 1 Illinois Blvd Hoffman Estates, IL 60169 VSO: James Lopez Ph: (847) 884-0030 ext. 2019 Hours: 9:00am-4:00pm (Thursday ONLY)

### Cook County

Cook County Dept. of Corrections 2799 S. California Ave Chicago, IL 60608 VSO Mike Cameron Ph: (773) 674-7100 9:00am to 4:00pm Friday No Public Access

### Cook County-Evanston Vet Center

Evanston Vet Center 1901 Howard Street Evanston, IL 60202 VSO: Angel Montes Ph: (847) 332-1019 Hours: 9:00-4:00 (Every Monday & Wednesday)

### Cook County #2

General Jones Armory 5200 S Cottage Grove Ave Room 101 - 103 North Chicago, IL 60615  
VSO: Sharon Buchanan Ph: (773) 363-1492 VSO: Michelle Richards Ph: (773) 363-9851 Hours: 8:00 AM to 4:00

### Cook County #3

IL Dept. of Veterans Affairs National Guard Armory 1551 N Kedzie Ave Chicago, IL 60651  
VSO: Angel Montes Ph: (773) 292-7894 Hours: 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM (Daily except Monday & Wednesday)

### Cook County #4

IL Dept. of Veterans Affairs 1010 Dixie Hwy - Suite 101 Chicago Heights, IL 60411 VSO: Michael Cameron Ph: (708) 754-6403 Hours: 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM (Daily except Friday)

### Cook County #5

Chicago Regional VA Office 2122 Taylor St - Suite 127 Chicago, IL 60612 Hours: 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM (Daily) Ph: (312) 980-4512 Receptionist: Charles Simmons Ph: (312) 980-4512

### Cook County #6

IL Dept. of Veterans Affairs Dept. of Employment Security 16845 S. Halsted Street Harvey, IL 60426 VSO: Charles Lawrence Ph: (708) 225-8030 Hours: 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM Daily

### Cook County #7

IL Dept. of Veterans Affairs 1515 S. Harlem Avenue Unit 1B Forest Park, IL 60130 VSO: Robert Iverson Ph: (708) 366-5020 Fax: (708) 366-5059 Hours: 8:00am-4:30pm (Daily)

Cook County #9

Palatine Township 721 S Quentin Rd - Suite 102 Palatine, IL 60067 VSO: James Lopez Ph: (847) 485-2772 Hours: 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM (Daily, Except Thursdays)

Cook County #10

Village of Orland Park 14700 S Ravinia Ave Orland Park, IL 60462 VSO: Charletta Lutchter-Hayes Ph: (708) 403-2011 Hours: 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM (Daily) Female Service Officer Available

Cook County #11

Illinois Department of Veteran's Affairs Frisbie Senior Center 52 E. Northwest Highway Des Plaines, IL 60016 VSO: Cynthia McKee Ph: (847) 294-4664 Hours: 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM Female Service Officer Available.

DuPage County #1

IL Dept of Veterans Affairs 421 N County Farm Rd Room 2-600A Wheaton, IL 60187 VSO: Marcus Woodward Ph: (630) 690-9449. Hours: 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM (Daily)

DuPage County #2

Leyden Township 2501 N Mannheim Rd Franklin Park, IL 60131 VSO: Cynthia McKee Ph: (847) 451-5111 Hr: 8:00am - 4:00pm Female Service Officer Available.

Kane County #1

IL Dept. of Veteran Affairs Elgin National Guard Armory 254 Raymond St Elgin, IL 60120 VSO: John Fanning Ph: (847) 608-0138 Hours: 8:00 AM to 3:30 PM (Daily).

Kane County #2

DuPage County Vet Center 750 Shoreline Dr., Suite 150 Aurora, IL 60504 VSO: Wesley Yi Ph: (630) 585-5372 Fax: (630) 585-5382 Hours: 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM (Daily).

VAC of Cook County

1100 S. Hamilton Avenue, Room Co11, Chicago, IL 60612

Superintendent: Abundio "Al" Zaragoza, [Abundio.zaragoza@cookcountyil.gov](mailto:Abundio.zaragoza@cookcountyil.gov), (312) 433-6010

VAC of DuPage County

421 N. County Farm Road, Wheaton, IL 60187, Superintendent: Steven Fixler,

[dupagevac@dupageco.org](mailto:dupagevac@dupageco.org), (630) 407-5655

VAC of Kane County

Government Center, 719 S. Batavia Ave. Rm 104, Geneva, IL 60134

Superintendent: John Carr, [carrjohn@co.kane.il.us](mailto:carrjohn@co.kane.il.us), (630) 232-3550

Veterans Homes:

The Adjutant Illinois Veterans Home - Anna  
792 N. Main Street  
Anna, Illinois 62906  
Phone: (618) 833-6302

The Adjutant Illinois Veterans Home - LaSalle  
1015 O'Conor Avenue  
LaSalle, Illinois 61301  
Phone: (815) 223-0303, ext. 210

The Adjutant Illinois Veterans Home - Manteno  
1 Veterans Drive  
Manteno, Illinois 60950  
Phone: (815) 468-6581

The Adjutant Illinois Veterans Home - Quincy  
1707 N. 12th Street  
Quincy, Illinois 62301  
Phone: (217) 222-8641