



'We Do This Daily, and We Always Do it for Free'

VFW's National Veterans Service helped veterans recover more than \$14.6 billion in VA benefits last year

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VFW's National Veterans Service and its network of more than 2,000 service officers worldwide reached a new record last year, helping veterans recover \$14.62 billion in 2024.

Since its inception 123 years ago, National Veterans Service has assisted veterans and their families in filing VA disability claims and securing earned benefits at no cost. Today, VFW Accredited Service Officers represent more than 590,500 veterans.

Michael Figlioli, director of VFW National Veterans Service, believes the recipe for this continued growth is the network's trustworthiness and excellent customer service by its highly trained professionals.

"Every single person that touches a claim is accredited by VA, which means they are trained to the standard set by VA for preparing claims and accessing VA data systems," Figlioli said. "When you work with one of our reps, the organization's name is behind the filing and the expertise and training of the individual."

Figlioli also noted that VFW Accredited Service Officers are dedicated to ensuring that every veteran, whether a VFW member or not, receives complete assistance during the entire process, from filing the claim to its review by the VA and any necessary follow-ups or appeals to secure the maximum benefits permitted by law.

"If there's any after-action work to be done, such as an appeal, the VFW is there to represent the veteran, family member or survivor all the way through to the end, unlike unaccredited bad actors who are just stealing money," Figlioli said. "It has been proven that those who seek assistance from an accredited representative will likely receive a better rating than those who pretend to know what they're doing."

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Figlioli added that VFW operates 26 pre-discharge claims sites across the U.S. and abroad, with locations in Europe, Guantanamo Bay, and Korea being covered remotely by service officers based in the U.S.

‘THIS IS TRULY THE MOST FULFILLING JOB I HAVE HAD’

VFW life member Jeffrey Cowell of St. Paul, Minn., is among the more than 2,000 VA-accredited service officers within the VFW’s network. As a VFW Department of Minnesota Service Officer since 2018, Cowell sees an average of about 35 veterans a week.

With the signing of the Honoring Our Pact Act on Aug. 10, 2022, Cowell’s caseload shifted from musculoskeletal claims to exposure-related claims, often varying in respiratory issues such as rhinitis, asthma and sinusitis. These conditions can range from post-9/11 veterans exposed to burn pits to Vietnam War veterans dealing with Agent Orange.

Cowell said his work impacts veterans from all walks of life and enriches his life with a purpose.

“I am grateful for the opportunity to assist veterans and their loved ones, and it gives me a chance to serve people,” said Cowell, who first earned his VFW eligibility in 2003 during a deployment with the Minnesota Army National Guard in support of Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom. “However, the most rewarding part is seeing the tangible changes VA benefits can have on spouses filing their survivor’s benefits in a difficult time, helping unhoused veterans achieve stability, and providing relief through medical care. This is truly the most fulfilling job I have had.”

Cowell, who himself was medically separated in 2007 and awarded 20 percent for his disabilities, understands the importance of seeking help from a knowledgeable source like those of VFW service officers.

“It was not until I got the job as a VFW claims examiner in September 2017 that I pursued any new claims or increases of my own,” Cowell said. “Assigning the VFW as your representatives ensures competent representation from step one all the way to the BVA. VFW’s training is top-notch. No one should file their claims on their own, and no one should have to pay for their rightfully earned benefits.”

‘THERE IS NO MAGIC BULLET’

Like Cowell, Figlioli stresses the countless hours veterans service officers devote to learning every detail and law at the federal and state levels to help veterans succeed in filing claims.

For VFW’s service officers, training can include up to 80 hours each year to maintain their qualification to represent veterans filing disability claims with the VA. Figlioli noted that only 40 hours of training annually are required by the VA, and that VFW’s service officers work tirelessly on behalf of veterans every day.

“There is no magic bullet for a VA claim other than being thorough and knowledgeable about the law and what can be claimed,” Figlioli said. “This is why we interview claimants and go through all their medical records so we can submit the best claim the first time and not have to go back time and again and unnecessarily prolong the process.”

Figlioli also reinforces his belief in the VFW’s policy of always remaining true to the veteran, regardless of the quick but false promises made by claim sharks.

“VFW-accredited reps tell claimants what they need to know and not what they want to hear,” Figlioli said. “Every claim submitted to VA goes to the same places for processing. For claim sharks to continue the old and tired narrative that they have some magic formula is an outright lie, and then they charge the veteran, family member or survivor for that lie.”

Figlioli emphasizes that VFW service officers yield to the side of ethical practice, cautioning veterans on the nefarious agendas of several private firms known to blatantly steal benefits from claimants who entrust them with power of attorney.

“We are subject to fines and, in some cases, even imprisonment if we were to defraud claimants the way these bad actors do,” Figlioli said. “If you want to file a claim and have not received a VA Power of Attorney, be very careful. You may be about to share your Personally Identifiable Information with someone who could defraud you or worse.”

To avoid missteps or fraud, Figlioli encourages veterans — VFW members or not — to contact a VFW claim site and begin working with a VA-accredited veterans service officer free of charge.

“We do this daily, and we always do it for free,” Figlioli said. “Neither the VFW nor any of our representatives take any portion of a claimant’s award. All \$14.62 billion we recovered last year went to the rightfully entitled persons.”

This article is featured in the May/June 2025 issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Ismael Rodriguez Jr.](#), associate editor for VFW magazine.