

Every claim for VA benefits requires a decision from the VA. The decision is a complex document that determines the origin, extent and effective dates of disabilities and the amount and circumstances of payment of monetary benefits. These decisions are reached by evaluating the evidence against the applicable law. In the development process, the VSO's attempt to gather all the evidence they are aware of will have a bearing on the decision. The VSO's role is to make the VA aware of the evidence they should consider, and to furnish whatever evidence the claimant has in their possession that he/she wants the VA to consider. Gathering and submitting the evidence that forms the decision is the role where a Service Officer can be most effective in assisting their client.

The salary of a Veteran Service Officer (VSO) can vary widely, but here are some average and percentile figures:

Annual salary: The average annual salary for a VSO is \$60,003, with a range of \$44,000–\$94,500

Hourly wage: The average hourly wage for a VSO is \$29, with a range of \$21–\$45. Factors that can affect a VSO's salary include: location, skill level, and years of experience.

As of September 2024, the average salary for a VSO in Kansas City, MO is \$58,543 per year, or \$28.15 per hour. (Source Zip Recruiter).

A good VSO can bring millions into a community. The chart below shows the return on investment over the last 10 years in Dubois County alone.

Summary of Expenditures For Dubois County 2014-2023											
Expenditures in \$000s											
Year	County/ Congressional District	Veteran Population	Total Expenditure	Compensation & Pension	Construction	Education & Vocational Rehabilitation/ Employment	Loan Guaranty#	General Operating Expenses	Insurance & Indemnities	Medical Care	Unique Patients
2023	DUBOIS	2,035	\$ 21,126	\$ 13,212	\$ -	\$ 603	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 17	\$ 7,294	742
2022	DUBOIS	2,115	\$ 18,368	\$ 10,992	\$ -	\$ 556	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 42	\$ 6,779	732
2021	DUBOIS	2,274	\$ 15,109	\$ 8,817	\$ -	\$ 639	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 187	\$ 5,465	738
2020	DUBOIS	2,318	\$ 14,895	\$ 7,861	\$ -	\$ 486	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 133	\$ 6,415	759
2019	DUBOIS	2,297	\$ 14,377	\$ 7,744	\$ -	\$ 521	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 360	\$ 5,752	769
2018	DUBOIS	2,359	\$ 11,744	\$ 6,157	\$ -	\$ 454	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 104	\$ 5,031	776
2017	DUBOIS	2,420	\$ 12,215	\$ 6,317	\$ -	\$ 618	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 165	\$ 5,115	754
2016	DUBOIS	2,481	\$ 11,739	\$ 6,607	\$ -	\$ 834	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 45	\$ 4,253	757
2015	DUBOIS	2,903	\$ 11,103	\$ 5,738	\$ -	\$ 789	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 79	\$ 4,497	772
2014	DUBOIS	2,953	\$ 10,719	\$ 5,546	\$ -	\$ 756	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 280	\$ 4,136	789

Source: <https://www.va.gov/vetdata/expenditures.asp>

The column stating veteran population is the number of estimated veterans in the county according to the VA. The Unique Patients column is the number of veterans who have VA Health Care. The column, Total Expenditure, is the amount of money sent to Dubois County. The money is split among Compensation and Pension, Education and Rehabilitation and Medical Care. The 2023 Total Expenditures are \$21.126 million.

Susan Bramlet started in spring of 2022. The impact that this skilled professional made is significant over her peers in the Compensation and Pension column, from 2014 to 2021. This is why the county should strongly consider hiring a full-time skilled claims professional.

The fastest growing source of income for the county is the Medical Care column. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) launched the Veterans Community Care Program on June 6, 2019. The program allows veterans to receive health care from local providers when they can't get care from a VA facility or would have to travel too far. The program was created to improve access to health care for veterans. Community Care can deliver a revenue stream that would impact Dubois County immensely. With Memorial Hospital being the hub for health care in the 6 surrounding counties (Pike, Martin, Daviess, Orange, Spencer, Crawford and Perry). Memorial Hospital and all its 11 affiliate medical offices in those counties are VA Affiliated approved partners. Many of the residents of those counties work, shop, dine and seek health care in Dubois County. As you can see by the Surrounding Counties

Chart. The combined counties get more than \$60 million in Compensation and Pension and \$47 million in Medical Care. In all there are 36 medical facilities in the combined 8 counties.

The economic impact from sales tax and property tax is a strong consideration for having an open County Service Office to accommodate those workers who live in other counties and work in Dubois County to seek veteran's services. A service office that is staffed to handle claims after 4:00 PM and Saturday mornings would assist veterans in receiving benefits and creating revenue for the county. This would of course require part-time assistants to man the office. The more people that get through the veteran's service office the more revenue the county brings in the more taxes it collects.

Surrounding Counties Expenditures in \$000s 2023										
County/ Congressional District	Veteran Population	Total Expenditure	Compensation & Pension	Construction	Education & Vocational Rehabilitation/ Employment	Loan Guaranty#	General Operating Expenses	Insurance & Indemnities	Medical Care	Unique Patients
DUBOIS	2,035	\$ 21,126	\$ 13,212	\$ -	\$ 603	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 17	\$ 7,294	742
DAVISS	1,757	\$ 16,685	\$ 9,146	\$ -	\$ 269	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 41	\$ 7,229	497
MARTIN	894	\$ 9,586	\$ 5,758	\$ -	\$ 177	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1	\$ 3,649	270
ORANGE	1,299	\$ 13,387	\$ 7,350	\$ -	\$ 169	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 60	\$ 5,808	462
PERRY	1,238	\$ 12,818	\$ 6,895	\$ -	\$ 190	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 19	\$ 5,715	425
PIKE	708	\$ 7,559	\$ 4,082	\$ -	\$ 156	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 13	\$ 3,308	252
SPENCER	1,315	\$ 16,391	\$ 8,418	\$ -	\$ 348	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 11	\$ 7,615	558
CRAWFORD	879	\$ 13,147	\$ 6,017	\$ -	\$ 218	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 12	\$ 6,899	336
Total	10,126	\$ 110,698	\$ 60,877	\$ -	\$ 2,129	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 174	\$ 47,519	3,542

Source: <https://www.va.gov/vetdata/expenditures.asp>

The office has been primarily focused on claims but an employee who can enroll a veteran into VA Health Care and then into Community Care would increase the Medical Care column for the county. In May of 2024, the VA granted all combat soldiers enrollment into VA Health Care. The VA also opened enrollment to those exposed to toxic chemicals during their enlistment whether in combat or not. There are 742 veterans enrolled in VA Healthcare in Dubois County. That is just under a third of the total veteran population. Every new veteran increases the Medical Care column by \$9,830 a year. For every 101 veterans we add, the Medical Care column increases by \$1 million. The more veterans who stay in the county to receive their health care the more revenue the county gets. Community Care can also be an employment driver as the additional patient load will increase employment at Memorial Hospital and its affiliates.

In the Education column you will notice that \$603,000 is spent in Dubois County for education and vocational rehabilitation. Partnering with VUJC's Career Advancement Partnership (CAP) program includes a two-year degree in Electronics Technology. This program is beneficial to NWS Crane's mission of supplying the Navy with state-of-the-art circuit boards. VUJC's Health Occupations curriculum will allow veterans to seek employment locally at Memorial and the various nursing care facilities. A service office that assists veterans toward local educational resources is part of the veteran service officer's responsibility.

A veteran's service office that is well staffed, well trained and well paid can grow the county's revenue in an abundance of ways. A veteran's service office that is understaffed, poorly trained and underpaid can lead to constant turnover and a community of veterans who become dissatisfied with the poor services they get. I see this in surrounding counties that are open just a few days a week and staffed with just one person part-time.

I would encourage the Commissioners of Dubois County to join the ranks of the many other counties in Indiana who have staffed up with full time employees who can drive revenue throughout the county.

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