



The Cabinet-level Reentry Council is working to enhance community safety and well-being, assist those returning from prison and jail in becoming productive citizens, and save taxpayer dollars by lowering the direct and collateral costs of incarceration.

Justice-Involved Veterans

Veterans are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system, but their numbers are significant. An estimated one of every ten criminal defendants and inmates has served in the U.S. military. Most justice-involved veterans are likely eligible for health care and other benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), although their eligibility is suspended or reduced while they are incarcerated.

Accomplishments to Date

- VA has reached more than 170,000 justice-involved veterans through direct outreach in prisons, jails, and criminal courts—including more than 1,000 state and federal prisons, and the estimated 350 Veterans Treatment Courts (VTCs) and other veteran-focused court programs. The purpose of this outreach is to connect veterans with needed mental health, substance abuse, and other clinical services when possible as an alternative to incarceration.
- VA revised its administrative policy that limited VA prison outreach to the six months prior to a veteran's release. The revised policy allows for assessment and release planning with incarcerated veterans earlier than six months before release, thus enhancing the odds of successful reentry.
- VA built a web-based system that allows prison, jail, and court staff to quickly and accurately identify veterans among their inmate or defendant populations. Called the Veteran Reentry Search Service (VRSS), the system also prompts VA field staff to conduct outreach to the identified veterans. Thirty state corrections departments are already using VRSS, and more are planning to do so.
- VA produced a brief outreach video intended for veterans in jail or prison, and distributed it for viewing in all state and federal prisons, as well as more than 500 local jails (and counting). Titled "Suits," the video was directed by an Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran. It encourages incarcerated veterans to use their time wisely by taking an active role in the reentry planning process, and informs them how to contact a VA outreach specialist for help.
- VA expanded eligibility for its health care services to include veterans in halfway houses, work-release centers, or other reentry-focused correctional settings. These veterans must often waive access to health care from the incarcerating authority to participate in such programs.
- The National Institute of Corrections (NIC) provides resources focused on justice-involved veterans including a [webpage](#), archived webinars, and a promising practices guide for VTCs—*Veterans Treatment Courts: A Second Chance for Vets Who Have Lost Their Way*.
- NIC is collaborating with the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) and the Center for Court Innovation on the Veterans Treatment Court Enhancement Initiative to develop an assessment screening tool specific to veterans in the criminal justice system along with a case planning protocol. This three-year project will include implementing the tool and protocol in pilot test sites.
- NIC is working with the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP), BJA, and the VA to develop a survey of VTC's performance and outcome measures to gather current data from existing programs that will identify core standard measures, demonstrate the success of these diversionary programs, and help to inform future veteran specific initiatives.

Agenda Moving Forward

Support Continued Expansion of Veterans Treatment Courts

The Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) model is an increasingly popular means for communities to come together to deliver needed services to veterans in crisis. VTCs build on the demonstrated success of drug courts in reducing recidivism and saving communities money, adding a peer mentoring component to harness the power of one veteran helping another. Access to VA health care and other benefits is an integral part of the VTC concept, and VA forms part of the treatment team in all VTCs. As their numbers grow, VA will continue to support VTCs both operationally and at the national level—for example, by collaborating to develop innovative training protocols.

Partner with Criminal Justice Stakeholders to Identify and Assist Justice-Involved Veterans

Through VRSS, prison, jail, and court staff can quickly and accurately identify veterans among their inmate or defendant populations. Widespread use of VRSS will not only inform correctional and court staff's interactions with veterans they serve, but will enhance VA's ability to

provide efficient, targeted outreach and reentry planning assistance to veterans in these systems. Working with local and national partners, VA will promote this valuable new resource nationwide.

Access to Legal Services

Veterans, particularly those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, have a significant and too-often unmet need for legal services. On a recent national VA survey, homeless and formerly homeless veterans indicated that legal services for eviction or foreclosure proceedings, child support issues, and outstanding warrants or fines accounted for three of their top ten unmet needs. Although VA cannot provide legal services directly, VA medical centers are making space available so that local legal service providers can work with veterans where they receive health care. To date, 83 clinics (operated by law school clinical programs, legal aid offices, and local pro bono consortia) are serving veterans in VA medical facilities. VA will continue to expand its facilities' role as a place where veterans can address their unmet legal needs.

Key Resources (Veterans)

Reentry Council

<http://csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc/projects/firc/>

Reentry MythBusters

<http://csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc/projects/mythbusters/>

National Reentry Resource Center

<http://csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc/>

VA Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) Program

<http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/VJO.asp>

NIC Webpage on Justice-involved Veterans

<http://nicic.gov/veterans>

VA Health Care for Reentry Veterans (HCRV) Program

<http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/Reentry.asp>

Veterans Crisis Line

1-800-273-8255, Press 1; or www.VeteransCrisisLine.net

National Call Center for Homeless Veterans

1-877-4AID-VET (1-877-424-3838); or
<http://veteranscrisisline.net/>