

Healing to Wellness Court Training  
September 2024

# Veterans Treatment Courts: National Trends, Promising Practices, and Considerations for Tribal Adaptations

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# Center for Justice Innovation (The Center)

Our approach involves collaboration among our three main teams: **research and evaluation**; **direct-service programming**; and **training and expert assistance**. Research informs programming, programming informs research, and both research and practice inform our efforts to train and assist communities across the U.S. and internationally in adopting tailored reforms.

The technical assistance (TA) team provides specialized support to multidisciplinary criminal legal stakeholders and organizations. As thought partners, we take time to identify and understand stakeholders' needs and address those needs with targeted training or specialized assistance from appropriate experts in the field. The Center provides remote and on-site support on a wide variety of criminal legal topics ranging from crime prevention and adjudication; mental health and substance use disorder treatment within the legal system; and fidelity to best practices in court operations, roles and responsibilities, and recovery program models. We are guided by transformation, anti-racism and anti-oppression, equitable collaboration, and person-centered practices.



# Tribal Justice Exchange

The Center's Tribal Justice Exchange works with tribal nations to enhance their justice systems in ways that promote tribal sovereignty, and support community wellness.



Our tribal justice team works with tribal nations across the United States.

See the full list of sites.



1. Absentee Shawnee
2. Ak-Chin Indian Community
3. Bay Mills Indian Community
4. Bristol Bay Native Association
5. Catawba Indian Nation
6. Cheyenne River Sioux Indian Reservation
7. Chickasaw Nation
8. Chippewa Cree Tribe
9. Colorado River Indian Tribes
10. Colville Tribes
11. Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes
12. Confederated Tribes of Coos Bay
13. Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana
14. Forrest County Potawatomi
15. Fort Belknap Indian Community
16. Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation
17. Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes
18. Grant Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians
19. Ho-Chunk Nation
20. Karuk Tribe
21. Kaw Nation
22. Kalispel Indian County
23. Kenaitze Indian Tribe
24. Kickapoo Tribe of Texas
25. Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
26. Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe
27. Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians
28. Lower Sioux Indian Community
29. Mashpee Wampanoag
30. Menominee Nation
31. Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe
32. Muscogee (Creek) Nation
33. Navajo Nation
34. Nez Perce Tribe
35. Nooksack Indian Tribe
36. Onondaga Nation
37. Pascua Yaqui Tribe
38. Penobscot Nation
39. Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe
40. Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation
41. Pueblo of Jemez
42. Puyallup Tribe of Indians
43. Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe
44. Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians
45. Red Lake Nation
46. Rosebud Sioux Tribe
47. San Carlos Apache
48. Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians
49. Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians
50. Shinnecock Indian Nation
51. Shoshone Bannock Tribes
52. Sokaogon Chippewa Community
53. Southern Ute Indian Tribe
54. St. Regis Mohawk Tribe
55. Suquamish Tribe
56. Three Affiliated - Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation
57. Tohono O'odham Nation
58. Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation
59. Tulalip Tribes
60. Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians
61. Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
62. Village of Atmautuk (Akiak Native Community)
63. White Earth Band of Ojibwe
64. White Mountain Apache Tribe
65. Wind River Reservation (Eastern Shoshone Tribe and Northern Arapaho Tribe)
66. Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska
67. Yakama Nation
68. Yavapai Apache Nation
69. Yurok Tribe

# What we will cover today

History and 10 Key Components of Veteran Treatment Courts (VTCs)

Overview of the Center's strategic planning efforts in VTCs across the country

National trends and promising practices

Tribal adaptations

# History of Veterans Treatment Courts

- Why do we have VTCs if we have adult drug courts/mental health courts?
- Anchorage, Alaska (2004)
- Buffalo, New York (2008) – Judge Russell!
- Other states followed to address specific issues with veterans that weren't being addressed in other treatment courts
- Federal funding to support implementation

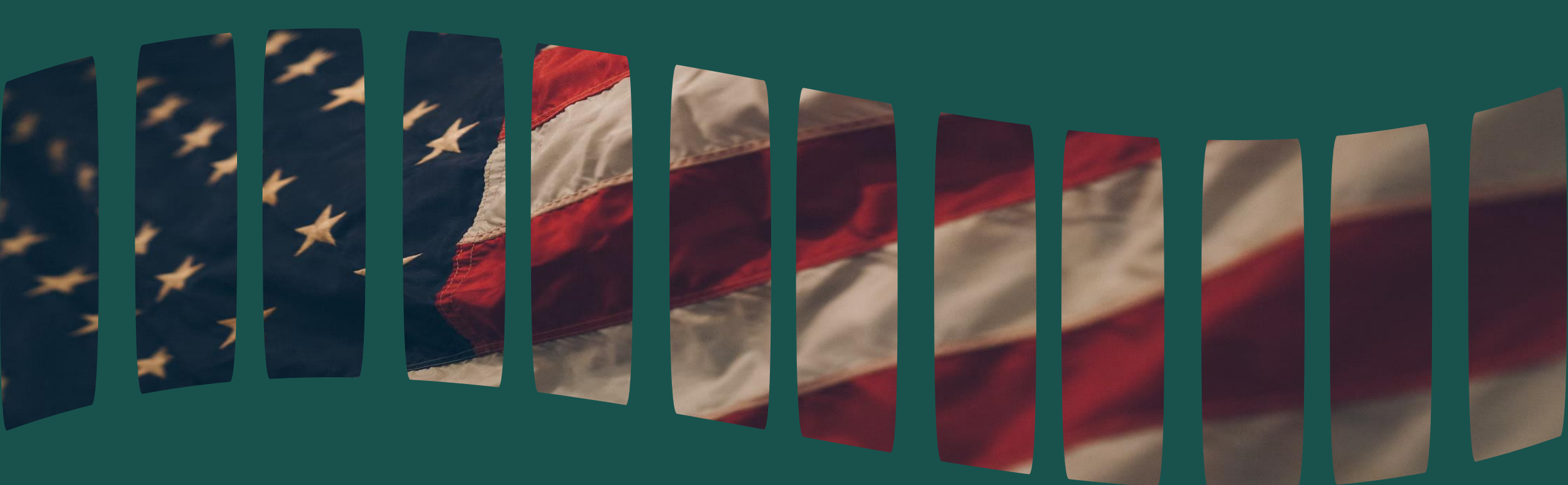
# Expansion of VTCS

2010 - an estimated 24 VTCS operational in

2020 - data reveals 476 operating in 42 states and one territory and about 500 today across the country!

## VTC Coordination Act

- Legislation required the DOJ to establish a formally authorized grant and TTA program to develop and maintain VTCS
- Increased coordination and assessments of the VTC
- In collaboration with the VA, BJA conducted listening sessions for the field in 2021
- Specific BJA VTC solicitation in FY2022 and 2023



# Ten Key Components of VTCs

### **Key Component #1:**

VTCs integrate alcohol, drug treatment, and mental health services with justice system case processing

### **Key Component #2:**

Using a non-adversarial approach, prosecution and defense counsel promote public safety while protecting participants' due process rights

### **Key Component #3:**

Eligible participants are identified early and promptly placed in the VTC program

### **Key Component #4:**

VTCs provide access to a continuum of alcohol, drug, mental health and other related treatment and rehabilitation services

### **Key Component #5:**

Abstinence is monitored by frequent alcohol and other drug testing



**Key Component #6:**

A coordinated strategy governs VTC responses to participants' compliance

**Key Component #7:**

Ongoing judicial interaction with each Veteran is essential

**Key Component #8:**

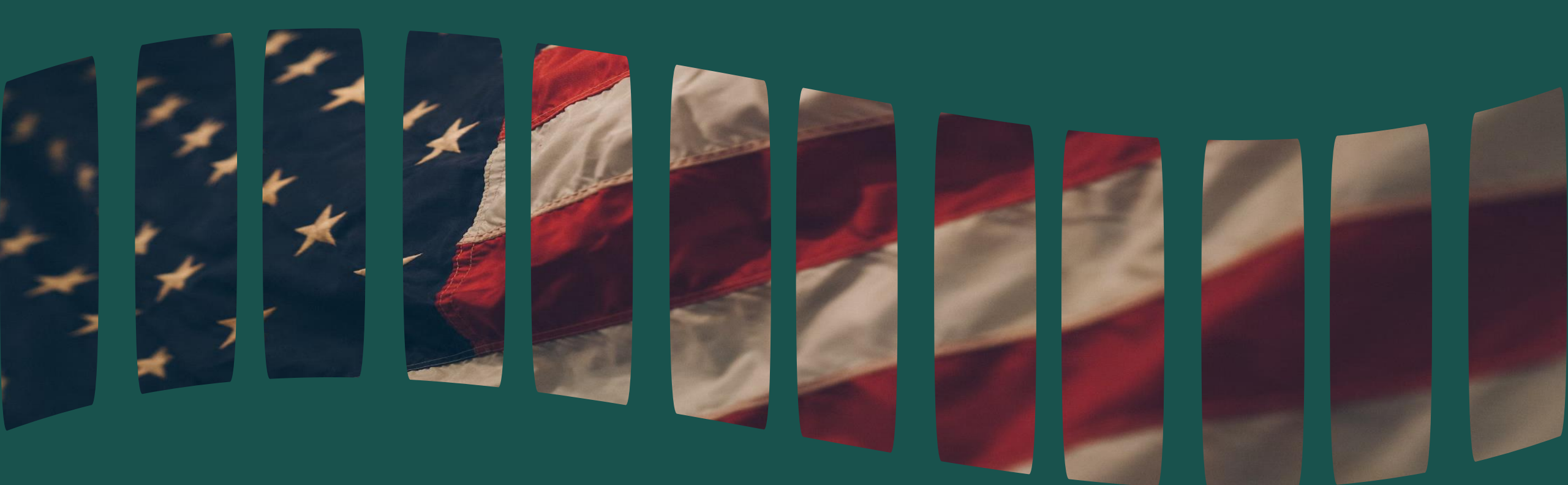
Monitoring and evaluation measure the achievement of program goals and gauge effectiveness

**Key Component #9:**

Continuing interdisciplinary education promotes effective VTC planning, implementation, and operations

**Key Component #10:**

Forging partnerships among VTCs, VA, public agencies, and community-based organizations generates local support and enhances VTC effectiveness



# Veterans Treatment Court Strategic Planning



# Strategic Planning Overview

## Needs Assessment

- VTC Operations Survey
- Stakeholder Interviews
- Review of court data
- Review of court materials
- January onsite visit
- Needs Assessment Report with Findings and Recommendations

## Onsite Strategic Planning

- Recap of Needs Assessment Findings and Recommendations
- Development of statewide mission and vision statements
- Action planning: development of goals and objectives responsive to needs assessment

## Strategic Plan

- Center staff and OJD collaborated to complete Action Plan including persons responsible and timelines
- Center staff produced a detailed Strategic Plan

# The VTC Assessment Tools



## Short Screener (VET-S)

- Eligibility

## Comprehensive Assessment (VET-C)

- Case planning

## VET-S and VET-C

- Implementation varies by site
- Use alone or together
- Need and risk flags
- *Risk levels after validation*

# National Veterans Landscape

Veterans

State

% of population who are Ve...

All

County View  OFF

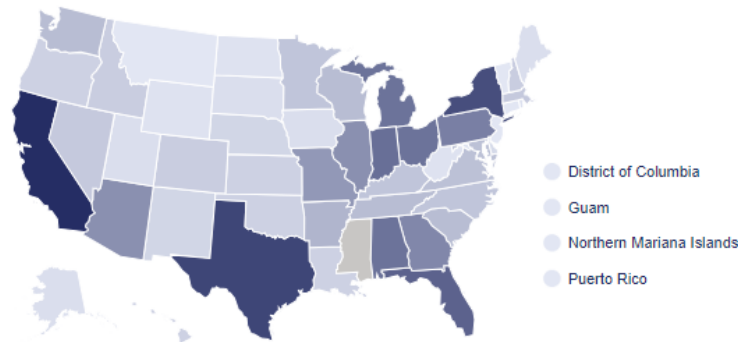
United States

4255  
Total Court Count  
331893745  
Population

Alabama

113  
State Total Court Count  
5039877  
Population

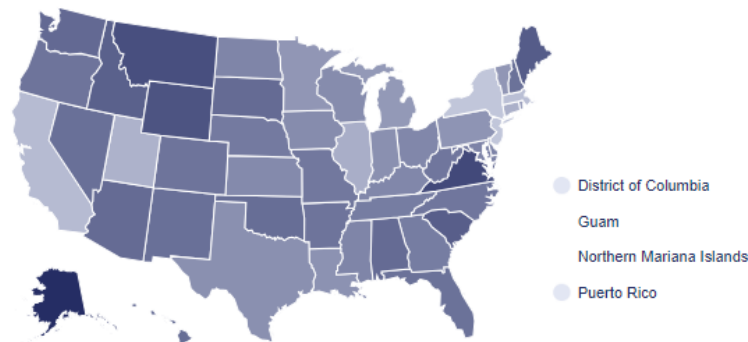
## Veterans Treatment Courts by State/Territory



## Veterans by State/Territory

State	# Veterans Treatment Courts	# of Veterans in population (2019)	% of population who are Veterans (2019)
United States	552	16501502	6.4%
California	45	1342337	4.4%
Texas	39	1408464	6.4%
New York	37	614289	3.9%
Florida	32	1356882	7.8%
Indiana	29	335248	6.4%
Alabama	28	315142	8.1%
Michigan	28	474645	6.0%
Ohio	28	621890	6.8%
Pennsylvania	25	641525	6.2%
Georgia	23	595743	7.3%
Arizona	21	454375	8.1%
Illinois	21	496352	5.0%
Missouri	19	355424	7.5%
Arkansas	12	177176	7.7%
South Carolina	10	353056	8.7%
Tennessee	10	394604	7.3%
Washington	10	490717	8.2%
Wisconsin	10	303641	6.6%
Maryland	9	332591	7.0%
Virginia	9	641144	9.7%
Kentucky	8	237597	6.8%
Minnesota	8	265920	6.1%

## % of population who are Veterans (2019)



# National Trends

Identification

Eligibility

Specific training topics

Veteran peer mentors

Transportation

Enhanced Support for VTC participants

# Identification of Veterans

Who is a veteran?

How would you ask  
someone if they are a  
veteran?





# Identification of Veterans

Federal definition: “The term “veteran” means a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released from there under conditions other than dishonorable.” (38 U.S. Code 101)

**VA Benefits:** You may be able to get VA health care benefits if you served in the active military, naval, or air service and didn’t receive a dishonorable discharge.

You must have served 24 continuous months or the full period for which you were called to active duty, unless any of the descriptions below are true for you

This minimum duty requirement may not apply if any of these are true:

- Were discharged for a disability that was caused—or made worse—by your active-duty service, or
- Were discharged for a hardship or “early out,” or
- Served prior to September 7, 1980
- If you’re a current or former member of the Reserves or National Guard, you must have been called to active duty by a federal order and completed the full period for which you were called or ordered to active duty. If you had or have active-duty status for training purposes only, you don’t qualify for VA health care.

# Identification of veterans

## Barriers

Stigma

Fear

Lack of information

Differing ways each person identifies

Lack of systematized information gathering

# Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists

<https://www.va.gov/homeless/vjo.asp#contacts>

## Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist Contacts

### Alabama

Birmingham, Birmingham VA Medical Center, [Rachel Parker](#), [Quinton Pickett](#)

Mobile/South Alabama, VA Gulf Coast Health Care System, [Kelly Estle](#)

Montgomery/Tuskegee, Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System, [Marguerita High](#), [Alisia Hansell](#)

Tuscaloosa, Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center, [Krista Davis](#)

### Alaska

Anchorage, Alaska VA Healthcare System and Regional Office, [Samantha Adams-Lahti](#), [Mindi Thomas](#)

### Arizona

Phoenix, Phoenix VA Health Care System, [Ellyn Black](#), [Anna Bourne](#), [Jennifer Morris](#), [Marti Rarick](#), [Monica King](#), [Todd Dahl](#), [Rachel Krausman](#), [Rachel Trott](#)

Prescott, Northern Arizona VA Health Care System, [Elizabeth Santos](#), [Lynda Woods](#)

Tucson, Southern Arizona VA Health Care System, [Steve Wenzel](#), [Amelia Hill](#)

### Arkansas

Fayetteville, Veterans Health Care System of the Ozarks, [Jeff Glover](#), [Marcy VanDeBerg](#), [Wendy Clanton](#)

Little Rock, Central Arkansas Veteran Healthcare System John L. McClellan Memorial Veterans Hospital, [Alexandra Blondell](#), [Charis Cook](#), [Eric Hudson](#), [Gertrude Thompkins](#)

[↑ Back to Top](#)

### California

Fresno, VA Central California Health Care System, [Nikki Garner](#), [Stella Botello](#), [Debra Mattos](#)

Loma Linda, VA Loma Linda Healthcare System:

Riverside County: [Laura Rodriguez](#), [Jennifer Garcia](#), [Cristin Campbell](#)

# Promising practices



VRSS

Relationship with  
Jails and vet pods

Relationship with  
VJOs



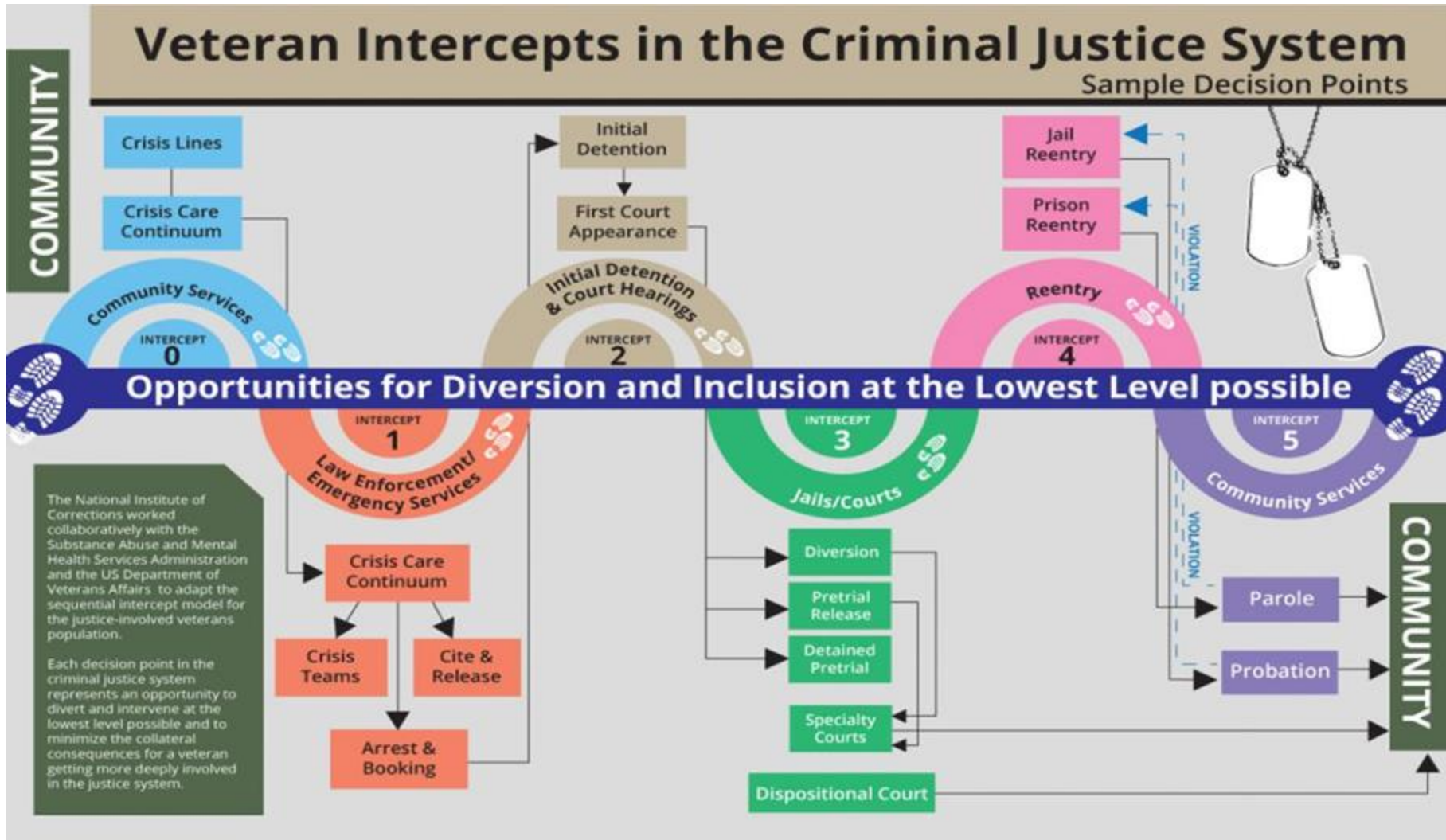
Appropriate self-  
identification  
questions

“Have you ever  
served in the U.S.  
military?” or  
“Have you served  
in the armed  
forces?”



Screening at all  
intercept points

# Program Entry into VTCs



# Ways to increase program entry



Written objective eligibility criteria



connect justice-involved veterans to services regardless of participation in VTC



Training on discharge status and what it means

# Training

## Veterans treatment court specific needs

- Military culture
- PTSD
- TBI
- MST

## Community buy-in:

- Are veterans receiving special treatment?





# National VTC Summit April 2024



# Veteran peer mentors

## Recruitment and retention

- Where to find volunteers
- How to retain volunteers
  - Time commitment
  - Money commitment

## Roles and responsibilities

- Training on mentor/mentee relationship
- Understanding their role in the program
  - Should they participate in staffing

## Women mentors

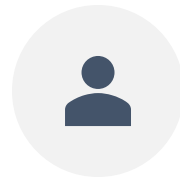
- Recruitment
- Court environment

## Younger mentors

- Time commitment
- May not be accessing the VA themselves

# Veteran peer mentors

# Promising practices



Veteran mentor coordinators



501(c)(3) non profit status



Written job descriptions & roles and responsibilities



Training

## Transportation

Same issues as other problem-solving courts with the extra layer of VA hospital locations

VTCs typically have high prevalence of DWI cases

Inability to attend treatment

# Promising practices



Funding for bikes, bus passes, ride sharing apps



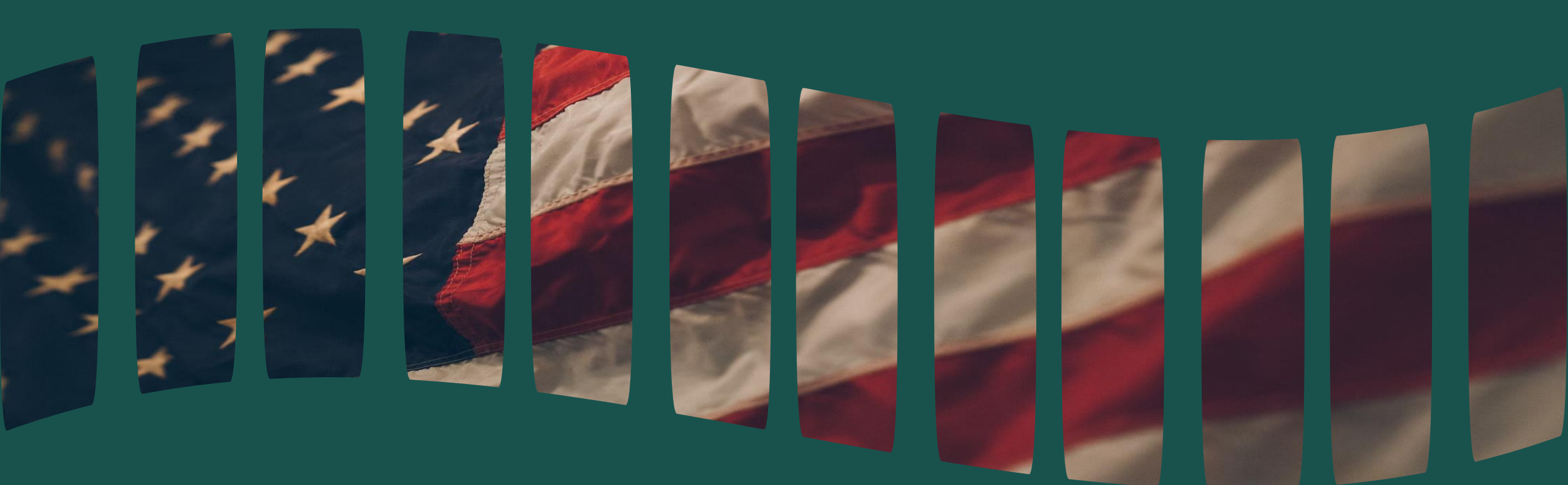
Participants driving others for community service hours



Teleservices



Using the VA teleservices in place already



# Oklahoma's plan for Veterans Treatment Courts

# Oklahoma Needs Assessment yielded four overarching themes:

- Fidelity to Best Practices
- Program Entry into VTCs
- Statewide Coordination and Collaboration
- Enhanced Support for VTC Participants

The strategic planning committee created the following vision and mission statement to serve as the foundation for the strategic plan:

***“Veterans Treatment Courts in Oklahoma service all eligible justice-involved veterans through equitable, comprehensive, compassionate, and focused services that adhere to evidence-based practices.***

***Veterans Treatment Courts take a holistic and individualized approach in assisting veterans to achieve their goals and restore their health, dignity, and honor. “***



**From the overarching themes, nine strategic planning goals emerged:**

**Goal 1 |** Identify all veterans entering the criminal justice system, to best meet their unique needs

**Goal 2 |** Ensure justice-involved veterans with all risk/need levels have access to diversion and treatment opportunities across the state

**Goal 3 |** Ensure all Veteran Treatment Courts have access to statewide resources for veterans and their families

**Goal 4 |** Increase collaboration and coordination among Veteran Treatment Courts

## From the overarching themes, nine strategic planning goals emerged:

**Goal 5** | Provide ongoing, consistent training specific to Veteran Treatment Courts

**Goal 6** | Establish a statewide mentor program for Veterans Treatment Courts

**Goal 7** | Create statewide examples of participant handbooks and policy and procedure manuals

**Goal 8** | Create policies that ensure medical decisions are made only by medical professionals

**Goal 9** | Collaborate with Tribal Nations to assist with development of Veterans Treatment Courts as needed

# All RISE E-Learning

The screenshot shows the All RISE E-Learning course catalog interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the All RISE logo on the left, a search bar in the center, and user information (Sheila McCarthy, Learner) on the right. A left sidebar contains navigation links: Home, My courses, Course catalog (highlighted), and Calendar. The main content area is titled "Course catalog" and includes a "Sort by" dropdown set to "Date" and a "Filters" button. A search filter for "veteran" is applied. Below the filters, a "Categories" section lists several categories with checkboxes: Essential Elements (10), Standards (8), Supervision (1), Treatment (10), and Veteran Treatment Court (2). The main display features five course cards, each with an icon, a title, a subtitle, and a "Get this course" button. The cards are: "Role of the Mentor in VTC" (icon: two people talking), "Military Culture" (icon: soldier), "Introduction to the VA" (icon: VA building), "Trauma Awareness" (icon: head profile), and "Veteran Mentor Coordinator" (icon: handshake). The "Veteran Mentor Coordinator" card shows a progress indicator of 0%.

Course catalog

Sort by Date ↓ Filters

veteran × Q

Categories

- Essential Elements (10)
- Standards (8)
- Supervision (1)
- Treatment (10)
- Veteran Treatment Court (2)

Role of the Mentor in VTC

Military Culture

Introduction to the VA

Trauma Awareness

Veteran Mentor Coordinator

Get this course

Get this course

Get this course

Get this course

0%

# Native American Veterans

As of 2021, U.S. Total Veterans: 19,162,515 (includes Washington DC, Puerto Rico, and U.S. Protectorates)

As of 2021, Total American Indian Alaska Native Veterans in U.S.: 159,868

(not including "2 or more races")

0.83%

As of 2022, 334,000 Veterans identify as AI/AN alone or in combination with other races

1. California	6. Florida
2. Oklahoma	7. North Carolina
3. Arizona	8. Montana
4. New Mexico	9. South Dakota
5. Texas	10. Washington

# Promising Practices | Current Landscape

Tribal Veteran Healing to Wellness Courts are restorative justice dockets established to respond to the offenses and treatment needs of veterans who are diagnosed with substance abuse. They are managed by a multidisciplinary team familiar with the unique experience and issues of Native veterans. They can operate as stand-alone dockets or as part of a more general Healing to Wellness Court.

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**TRUST YOUR ADVENTURE WITH US**

Yurok Veterans Wellness Court

230 Klamath Blvd. Ste A  
P.O. Box 1027  
Klamath, CA 95548  
707-951-8676  
veterans@yuroktribe.nsn.us

.....

**VETERANS CRISIS LINE**  
DIAL 988 THEN PRESS 1  
OR TEXT 838255

**VETERAN CALL CENTER**  
1-877-WAR-UETS

**HOMELESS VETERAN HOTLINE**  
1-877-4AID-UET

**YUROK VETERANS WELLNESS COURT**

**VETERANS BENEFITS**  
1-800-827-1000

A higher percentage of Native Americans served post-9/11 than any other ethnicity.

Throughout WWII, nearly 800 American Indian women served in the U.S. military.

COME ON A HEALING JOURNEY WHERE THE PATH IS GUIDED BY CULTURE, TRADITION, AND COMMUNITY

- ❖ TLPI is working with the Blackfeet Nation and their Veteran's Services Officer, slated to do an onsite training this fall.
- ❖ 8th Judicial Court of Montana has a grant for a Veterans Court specifically for Native Americans

# Tribal Healing to Wellness Courts: The Key Components

**Key Component #1: Individual and Community Healing Focus:** Tribal Healing to Wellness Court brings together alcohol and drug treatment, community healing resources, and the tribal justice process by using a team approach to achieve the physical and spiritual healing of the individual participant, and to promote Native nation building and the well-being of the community.

**Key Component #2: Referral Points and Legal Process:** Participants enter Tribal Healing to Wellness Court through various referral points and legal processes that promote tribal sovereignty and the participant's due (fair) process rights.

**Key Component #3: Screening and Eligibility:** Eligible court-involved substance-abusing parents, guardians, juveniles, and adults are identified early through legal and clinical screening for eligibility and are promptly placed into the Tribal Healing to Wellness Court.

**Key Component #4: Treatment and Rehabilitation:** Tribal Healing to Wellness Court provides access to holistic, structured, and phased alcohol and drug abuse treatment and rehabilitation services that incorporate culture and tradition.

**Key Component #5: Intensive Supervision:** Tribal Healing to Wellness Court participants are monitored through intensive supervision that includes frequent and random testing for alcohol and drug use, while participants and their families benefit from effective team-based case management.

**Key Component #6: Incentives and Sanctions:** Progressive rewards (or incentives) and consequences (or sanctions) are used to encourage participant compliance with the Tribal Healing to Wellness Court requirements.

**Key Component #7: Judicial Interaction:** Ongoing involvement of a Tribal Healing to Wellness Court judge with the Tribal Wellness Court team and staffing, and ongoing Tribal Wellness Court judge interaction with each participant are essential.

**Key Component #8: Monitoring and Evaluation:** Process measurement, performance measurement, and evaluation are tools used to monitor and evaluate the achievement of program goals, identify needed improvements to the Tribal Healing to Wellness Court and to the tribal court process, determine participant progress, and provide information to governing bodies, interested community groups, and funding sources.

**Key Component #9: Continuing Interdisciplinary and Community Education:** Continuing interdisciplinary and community education promote effective Tribal Healing to Wellness Court planning, implementation, and operation.

**Key Component #10: Team Interaction:** The development and maintenance of ongoing commitments, communication, coordination, and cooperation among Tribal Healing to Wellness Court team members, service providers and payers, the community and relevant organizations, including the use of formal written procedures and agreements, are critical for Tribal Wellness Court success.

# TRIBAL VETERANS HEALING TO WELLNESS COURTS

Integrate specific Key Components from both types of court in order to address the unique characteristics of AIAN Veterans

- 1) incorporating a physical and spiritual healing philosophy that includes holding substance-abusing individuals and their families accountable;
- 2) involving the Veterans Administration Healthcare Network (and IHS) and Veterans support organizations in the collaborative team approach;
- 3) incorporating the appropriate Native cultures and traditions in treatment and services, *e.g.*, the critical involvement of family, extended family, and the community in the healing process;
- 4) continuing team and community education that includes the VA and Veteran volunteer mentors;
- 5) forming coalitions between private community-based organizations, criminal justice agencies, IHS, and the VA; and
- 6) ongoing interaction and relationships between team and community that includes community and tribe members

# Questions

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Alisha Morrison, [morrisona@innovatingjustice.org](mailto:morrisona@innovatingjustice.org)