

VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION (VHA) HOMELESS PROGRAMS OFFICE

VETERANS JUSTICE PROGRAMS (VJP)

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Veterans Justice Programs (VJP): Mission & Vision

Mission

- To identify justice-involved Veterans and contact them through outreach, in order to facilitate access to VA services at the earliest possible point. Veterans Justice Programs accomplish this by building and maintaining partnerships between VA and key elements of the criminal justice system.

Vision

- Every justice-involved Veteran will have access to the care, services and other benefits to help him or her maximize their potential for success and stability in the community, including by avoiding homelessness and ending their involvement in the justice system.



Photo by Gerald Dupris

Discussion Objectives

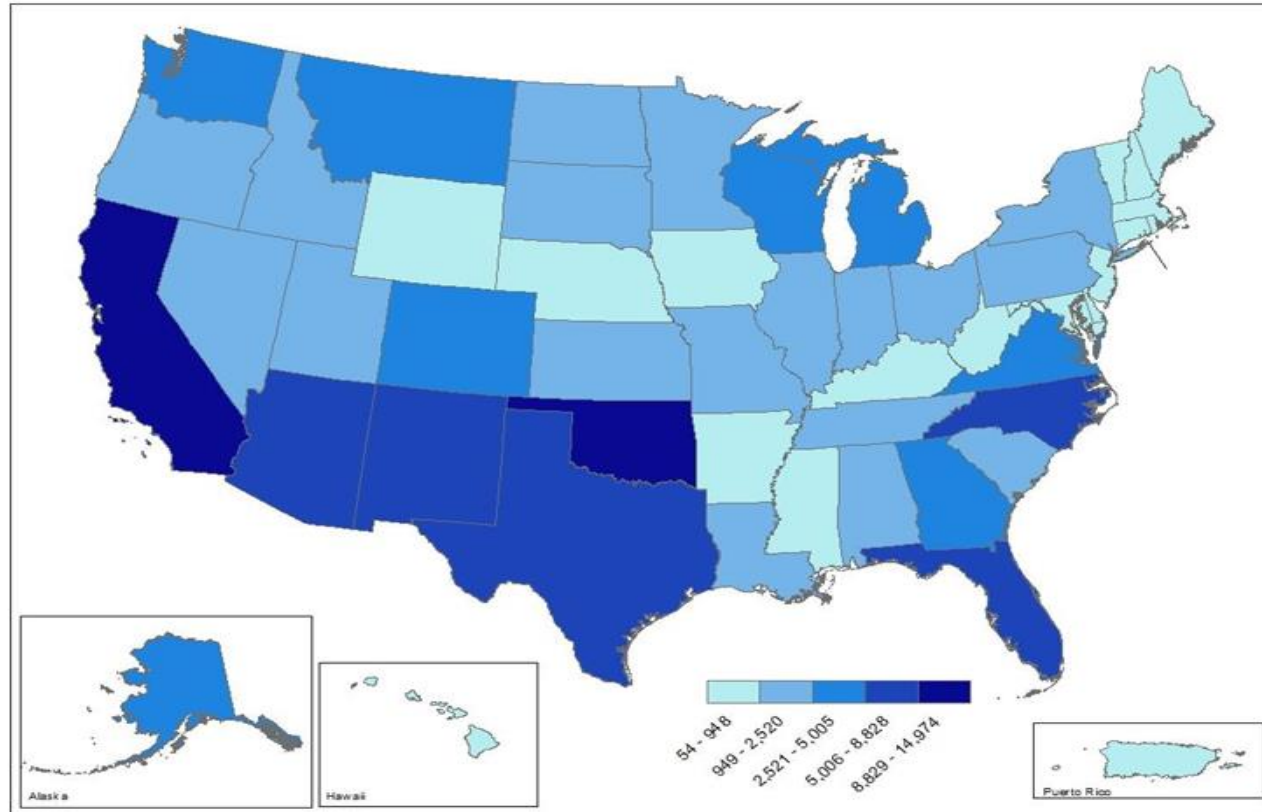
- Discuss the needs of justice-involved Veterans and how efforts at VA are working to address those needs.
- Explore ways to identify Veterans.
- Learn how to connect with local Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists and VA resources.



Photo by Angella Bates

Number of Native Veterans Nationwide

Figure 1. Map of AIAN Veteran Population by State: 2017



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Public Use Microdata Sample, 2017.
Prepared by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics

Native American Veterans in Rural Areas

- American Indian and Alaska Native American Veterans are over-represented in rural areas relative to Veterans of other races.
 - Roughly 39% live in rural areas, often on reservations or tribal lands which are often remote, isolated, and considered highly rural.
 - Proportionately higher than any other racial or ethnic group, with 29% of Whites, 12% of Latinos, and 9% of Asian Veterans living in rural areas.
- All Veterans who live in rural settings have lower health-related quality of life than their urban counterparts.
 - Barriers are poverty and uninsured rates, hospital closures, travel distances, limited broadband internet

Did You Know?

- AI/AN may be eligible for copayment exemption and reimbursement of copays for health care and urgent care visits from 2022 to present



Photo by Angella Bates

VHA

- The largest integrated health care system in the country.
- VHA manages 1,321 health care facilities including 172 medical centers and more than 1,000 outpatient clinics across the country.
- VHA offers primary care, mental health, substance abuse treatment, housing support, and employment services, and other types of specialty care.
- Over 9 million Veterans are enrolled in VHA programs.



Photo by Angella Bates

VJP Outreach Services

Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO)

- Gain access to the jail
- Identify veterans and determine eligibility
- Conduct outreach, assessment, and case management for Veterans in local courts and jails
- Provide/coordinate training for law enforcement personnel
- Linkage to VA and community services/resources

- Number of VJP Specialists funded: 506
- Number of local jail facilities serviced: 2,108
- Number of Veterans served by VJO in FY23: 41,693



Photo by Angella Bates

VJP Outreach Services

Health Care for Reentry Veterans (HCRV)

- Gain access to the prison
 - Educate Veterans' groups about VA and VA services
 - Identify Veterans and determine eligibility
 - Reentry planning
 - Linkage to VA and community services
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- Number of state and federal prisons serviced: 1,031
 - Number of incarcerated Veterans served by HCRV in FY23: 8,438

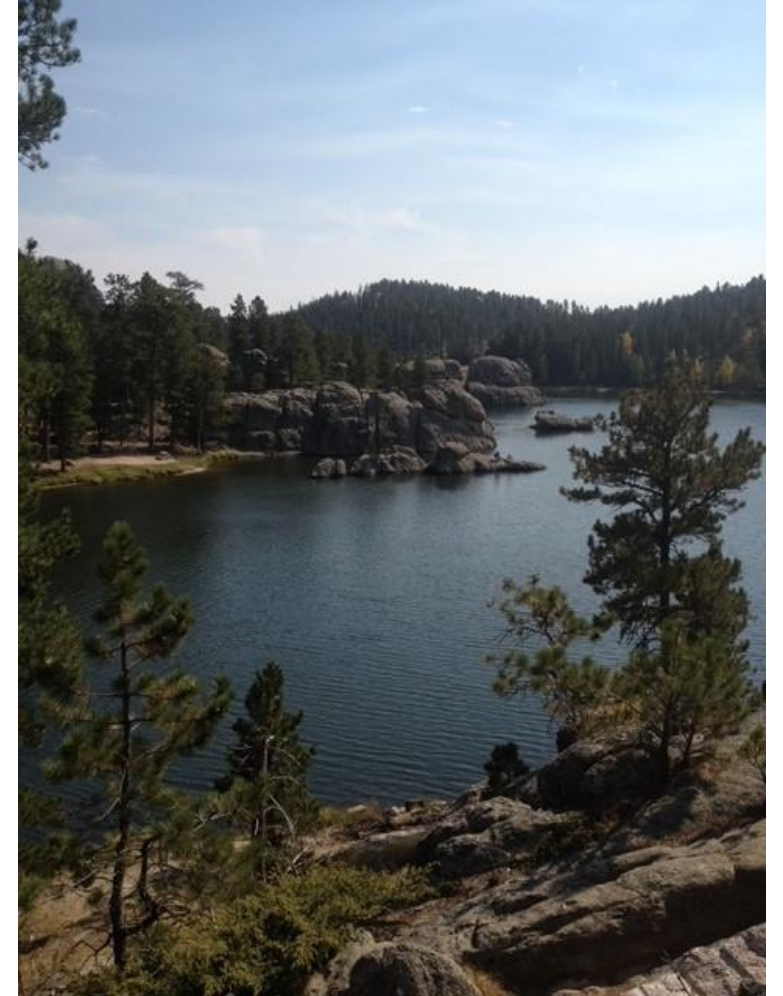


Photo by Angella Bates

Limits on VA Services for Incarcerated Veterans

- VA can provide:
 - Outreach, assessment, referral, and linkage to services
 - Treatment for justice-involved Veterans who are not incarcerated
- Title 38 CFR 17.38 (c)(5) does not allow VHA to provide:
 - Hospital and outpatient care for a Veteran who is
 - Either a patient or inmate in an institution of another government agency if that agency has a duty to give that care or services



Photo by Angella Bates

VA Partnership with Veterans Treatment Courts

- Veterans Treatment Courts:
 - Hybrid Drug and Mental Health Treatment Courts, serving Veteran defendants
 - Volunteer Veteran Mentors
 - VJO specialists support 731 courts operating in 48 states and one territory
- VA Contributions:
 - VJO Specialist on treatment team; in courtroom when in session
 - Linkage to health care services at VA medical centers
 - Regular updates on Veterans' progress in VA treatment
 - VA does not establish, fund, operate, or set eligibility rules

Role of the VJO Specialist in a VTC

- With proper releases in place, provide information to VTC teams about a Veteran's diagnoses and treatment needs, which can inform the court's determination about the Veteran's clinical appropriateness for acceptance into the court.
- Provide updates to the court team regarding treatment recommendations, changes, and Veteran engagement with care/services.
- Identify VA and non-VA treatment resources for Veterans and courts to consider.
- Advocate on behalf of justice-involved Veterans for access to appropriate treatment.

Role of the VJO Specialist in a VTC

- Collaborate with judges and specialty courts to connect Veterans to indicated VA treatment and other services attending to the whole health of justice-involved Veterans.
- Provide general information regarding VTCs to key community stakeholders, Veterans and VA personnel.
- Facilitate community-based training and education for the jail, courts, and other criminal justice partners regarding Veteran-specific issues, available services, and local VTCs.
- Provide education to VTC mentors as needed.
- Provide case management services, as appropriate.

Peer Specialist

- What is a Peer Specialist and what do they do?
- Building Trust and Rapport
- Outreach Efforts
- Life Experiences
- Impact, Success, and Advocacy



Photo by Gerald Dupris

What are the Needs of Justice Involved Veterans?

- Most Veterans seen in VJO have a mental health (72%) or substance use disorder (56%) diagnosis, or both (48%).
- In Fiscal Year 2019:
 - **11%** of Veterans seen in VJO had an opioid use disorder diagnosis



Photo by Evelyn Small

Suicide Risk and Justice-Involved Veterans

- Justice-involved Veterans are 3x more likely to have attempted suicide in their lifetimes as compared to non-justice-involved Veterans.*
- Overall, 48.7% of Veterans who died from suicide in 2021 had received VHA or VBA services in 2020 or 2021, while 51.3% of Veterans in 2021 did not.
 - This means – we need the community’s help connecting with our most vulnerable Veterans.

Needs of Justice Involved Veterans

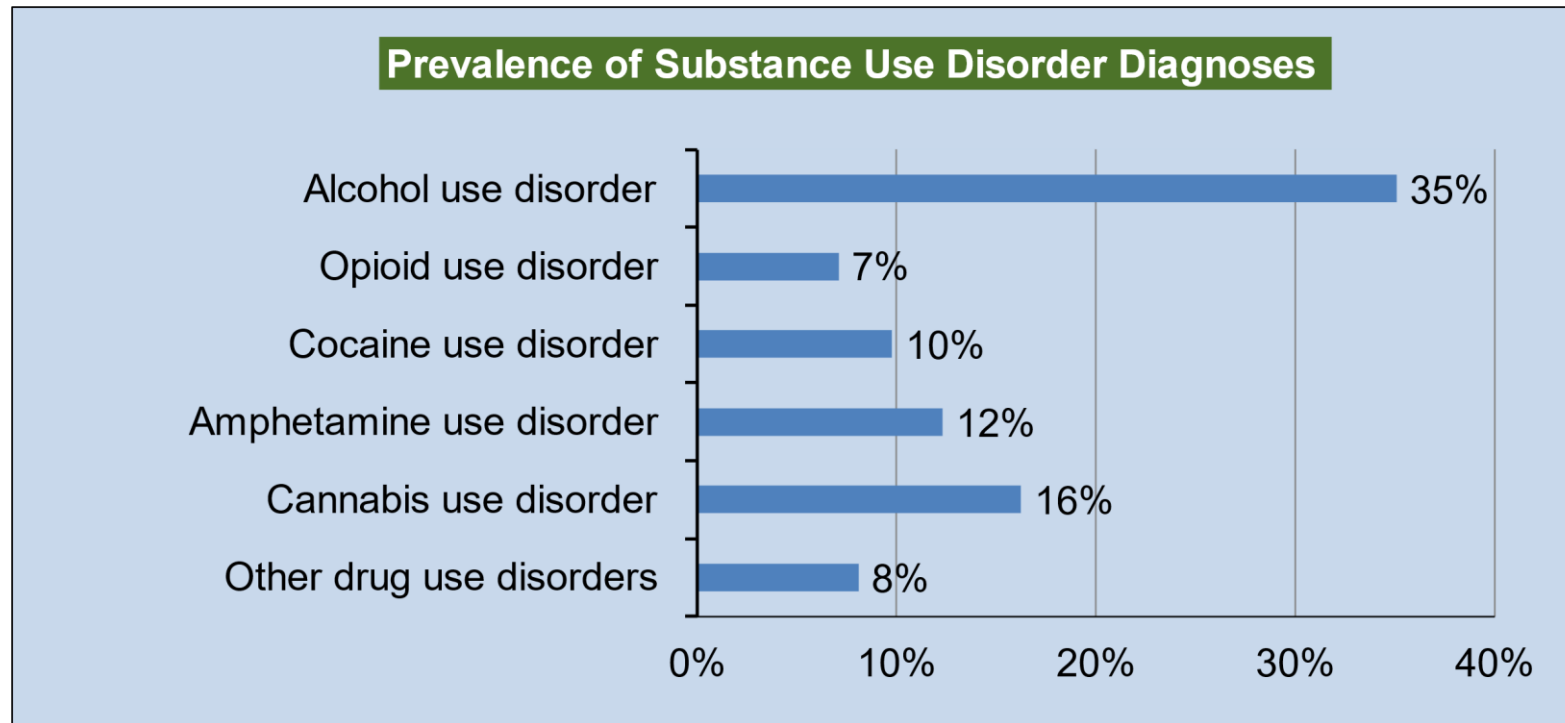
- Incarceration as an adult male is the single highest risk factor of ever being homeless. (Burt, 1999)
 - Of Veterans seen in VJP in Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, 33% were homeless or in a homeless program. (Finlay, 2023)
 - 27% of incarcerated Veterans reported homelessness 12 months before criminal arrest. (Elbogen, 2023)
 - VA remains committed to ending Veteran homelessness.



Photo by Angella Bates

Substance Use Disorder Diagnoses

- In FY 2023, 47% of Veterans connected to VHA services through VJP were diagnosed with one or more substance use disorders (SUD).



Suicide Prevention and Justice Involved Veterans

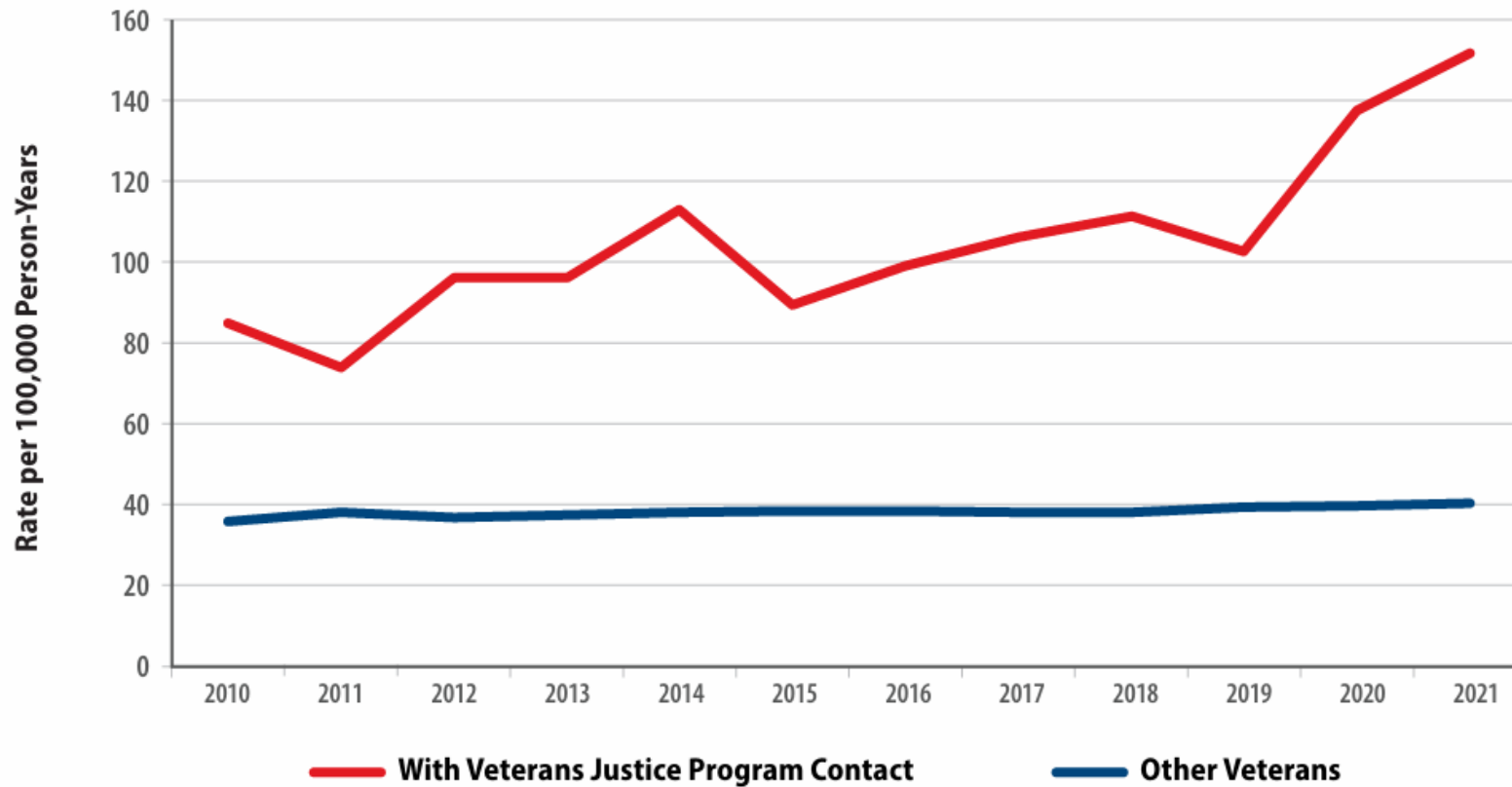
- [2023 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report:](#)
 - Among Veterans in VHA care, those with legal system involvement were at increased risk of suicide-related behavior. The suicide rate for recipients of VA Justice Program services was 10.2% higher in 2021 than in 2020.

Heavily Impacted Groups in 2024

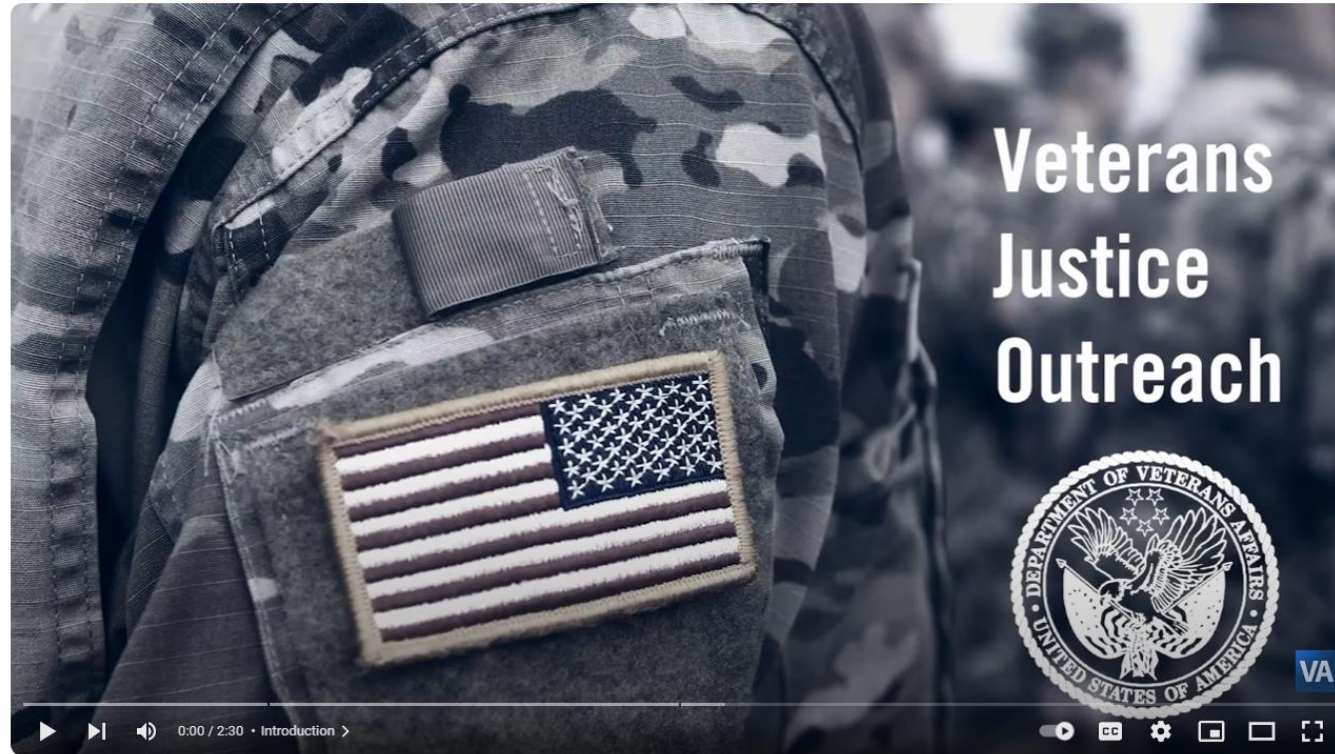
- Women
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- VHA Enrolled
- Homeless
- Justice-involved

Suicide Rate

Figure 24: Unadjusted Suicide Rate, Recent Veteran VHA Users, by Receipt of Veterans Justice Program Services, 2010–2021¹⁴⁴



Preventing Suicide Among Justice Involved Veterans

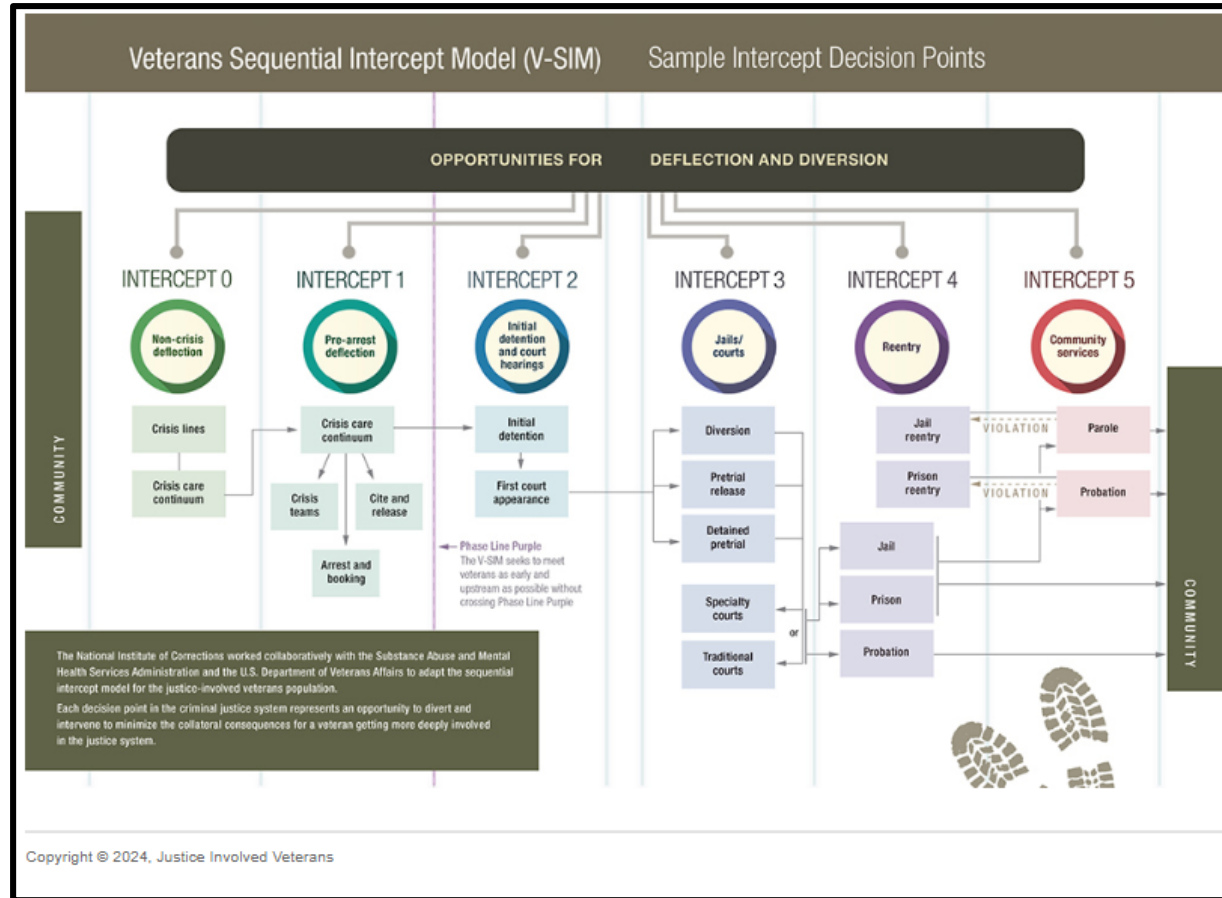


Preventing Suicide among Justice-Involved Veterans

In a video sponsored by VA, a VJO Coordinator explains suicide risk factors among justice-involved Veterans and provides resources for Veterans that may be beneficial to those working with justice-involved Veterans within VHA and the community. [Watch the video.](#)

Veteran Intercepts in the Criminal Justice System

National Institute of Corrections Veterans Sequential Intercept Model



Veterans Deflection

- Deflection (intercepts 0-1)
 - Early upstream preventative approach to substance use and mental health that offers pathways for a community-based response to occur before an event such as an overdose, arrest, or mental health crisis.
- Veterans Deflection
 - The opportunity to create Veteran-specific deflection interventions and/or ensure that new and existing deflection programs screen every adult encountered to determine Veteran status, are actively engaged with local VA partners, and can provide a warm handoff into VA care for eligible Veterans.

VA's role in Veterans Deflection

- Deflection programs, Veteran focused or otherwise, are initiated, funded, and operated by local communities, rather than by VA.
- VA supports deflection programs through the engagement of its VJO specialists and through the health care services it provides to Veterans, most of whom would otherwise receive care at county expense or worse, not be offered at least the chance for support.



Photo by Robert Dunsmore

Identifying Veterans

- We know Veterans exist in criminal justice populations.
- VA has outreach programs to respond to the needs of those Veterans.
- So then, how do we find them?
- Is the criminal justice agency screening for Veteran status?
- If so, are they asking the most inclusive question?
 - Suggest asking, “Have you ever served in the United States Military?”
- Or use a free VA web-based tool, Veterans Reentry Search Service, VRSS.

VRSS Video



Identifying Veterans

- VRSS is a Web-based tool that allows VA to offer its criminal justice partners an improved method of identifying Veterans within their defendant or inmate populations. It also allows VA to conduct more targeted, effective outreach in these settings.
- VRSS is part of the VA's major initiative to End Veteran Homelessness
 - Incarceration is the most powerful predictor of homelessness.
 - Ending Veteran Homelessness is an urgent and enduring priority for VA.

VRSS Background

- Historically, efforts to identify Veterans in criminal justice settings have relied on self-reporting (“Did you serve in the U.S. military?”).
- For a variety of reasons, Veterans may not self-report.
- The Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates that 7-8% of the U.S. prison and jail populations are Veterans.
 - Example: The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation houses about 100,000 prisoners. By self-reporting, 2.7% of inmates identified themselves as Veterans. Using VRSS, 7.7% of inmates were determined to have a record of military service. That five percent difference = approximately 5,000 previously unidentified inmates.

What Information Does VRSS Provide?

- CF/CS User (court, jail, prison): PIDs (user-assigned unique identifiers) only – no names or other identifying information
- VJP User: name, date of birth, Social Security number, discharge status, number of days active duty service (all pulled from VA copy of DoD personnel records)
- Why?
 - An individual's Veteran status is not protected information, so when asked whether someone served, VA can answer yes or no.
 - However, VA cannot provide VRSS users with names or other identifying information without a Veteran's express permission – even though that information was included in the user's submission file
- No restriction on VRSS users sharing results/Veteran status with partners

Another Resource

- SQUARES - Status Query and Response Exchange System
 - VA web application that provides VA employees and external organizations (homeless service community partners, law enforcement partners (police departments, sheriff departments, courts, and jails) local, state and federal agencies with reliable, detailed information about Veteran eligibility.
 - [Watch our SQUARES overview video.](#)
 - [Apply for access.](#)

Legal Services for Veterans (LSV)

- Outreach, training and coordination designed to expand access to legal service to Veterans.
- Further Veteran's legal service access through the continued growth of Medical Legal Partnership model within the Veteran Health Administration(VHA).
- Establish and administer VHA's new legal services grant programs.
- [Learn more at our LSV website.](#)



Photo by Gerald Dupris

Allowable Legal Services

- Allowable legal services covered under this grant program include legal services related to (38 C.F.R. 79.20):
 - Housing, including eviction defense, representation in landlord-tenant cases, & foreclosure
 - Family law, including assistance in court proceedings for child support and custody, divorce, estate planning, and family reconciliation;
 - Income support, including assistance in obtaining public benefits;
 - Criminal defense, including defense in matters symptomatic of homelessness such as outstanding warrants, fines, driver's license revocation, and citations (to reduce recidivism and facilitate the overcoming of reentry obstacles in employment or housing, covered legal services relating to criminal defense also include legal assistance with request to expunge or seal a criminal record);
 - Requests to upgrade the characterization of discharge or dismissal of a former member of the Armed Forces and;
 - Other covered legal services as the Secretary determines appropriate.

Outcomes: What Do We Know So Far?

- Recent research by a VA investigator demonstrated that in FY 2023:
 - Within one year of their VJO outreach visit, 73% of Veterans diagnosed with a mental health disorder received mental health treatment through the VHA, averaging 10 visits in that year.
 - Within the same timeframe, 40% of VJO Veterans with substance use disorder diagnoses had at least one VHA substance use disorder visit, averaging 7 visits in that year. (Finlay, 2023)

How do I connect with a VJP Specialist?

- Contact your nearest VJO specialist here: <https://www.va.gov/homeless/vjo.asp#contacts>
- Contact your nearest HCRV specialist here: <https://www.va.gov/homeless/reentry.asp#contacts>



Photo by Angella Bates

Discussion: Issues/Themes

- Expectations/boundaries
- Advocacy for Treatment
- What VJO can't do
- “Court Liaison and Beyond”



Photo by Angella Bates

Discussion: Issues/Themes (cont.)

- Information sharing
- Flexibility/adaptation
- Access barriers and strategies
- Distinguishing VJO and mentor roles



Photo by Evelyn Small

Questions?

Thank you for your time!

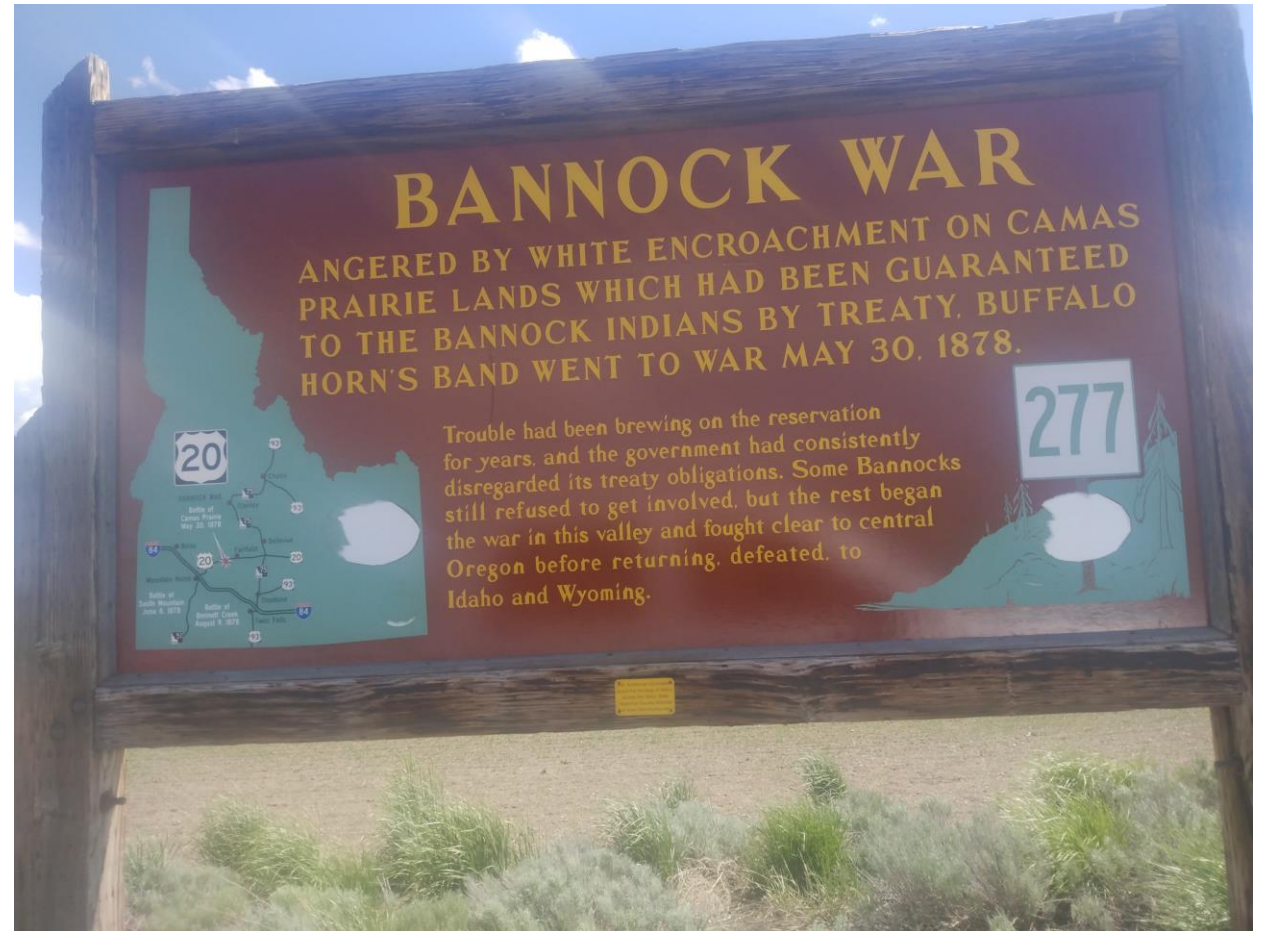


Photo by Evelyn Small

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