

Office of Health Equity

Veterans Health Administration

Department of Veterans Affairs



JUSTICE INVOLVED VETERANS AND TREATMENT COURT

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INTRODUCTION

Equitable access to high-quality care for all Veterans is a major tenet of the VA health care mission, and the Office of Health Equity (OHE) champions the elimination of health disparities to achieve health equity for all Veterans.

A 2015 Bureau of Justice Statistics article estimated the number of incarcerated Veterans to be 181,500 in federal and state prisons and local jails. About two-thirds of these Veterans were discharged from federal service between 1974 and 2000 and may have increased risk of mental health concerns related to serving in the military.

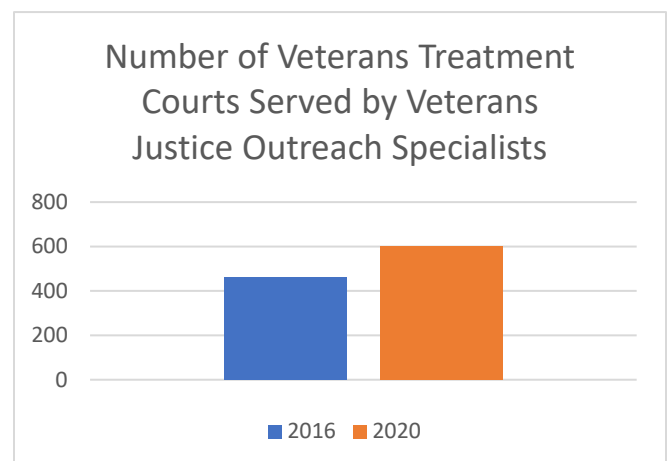
UNIQUE NEEDS OF JUSTICE INVOLVED VETERANS

Justice involved Veterans often have mental health and substance use concerns. Veterans are more likely than non-Veterans to have had a traumatic experience. These health-related concerns create needs that differ from non-Veteran justice involved adults. Justice involved Veterans have a higher prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, substance abuse, and alcoholism. Adjusting to civilian life after military service and managing mental health and substance

use issues can be difficult for Veterans, especially those who have served in combat zones, and experienced injuries, and/or emotional trauma. Veterans who do not successfully manage these conditions may experience increased homelessness, violent behaviors, and involvement with the justice system.

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF JUSTICE INVOLVED VETERANS

VA is working to identify and offer services to justice involved Veterans through the Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) Program.



From: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Homeless Programs Office, Veterans Justice Outreach Program

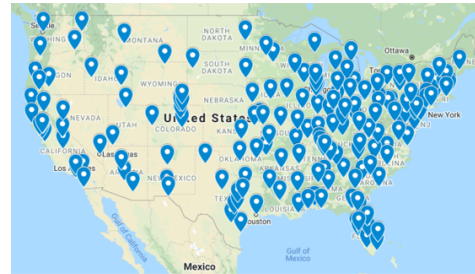
The VJO Program began in 2009 and is part of the VA Homeless Programs Office (HPO). VJO Specialists work with Veterans in various criminal

justice settings, including Veterans Treatment Courts (VTCs). VTCs are community initiatives that work to help Veterans get treatment for their unique clinical needs, within the context of the criminal justice system. Local courts administer these programs and tailor program elements to their jurisdictions, so eligibility and processes vary. Local governments also fund VTCs. VA plays a supportive role to VTCs by connecting Veteran participants to health care services through VJO Specialists who serve on the treatment teams.

For many years, researchers have demonstrated that treatment for mental health and substance use disorders decrease negative outcomes and the recidivism of justice involved adults. This is also true for Veterans. VTCs are among the rapidly growing specialty courts in the United States. The number of VTCs has increased over time allowing more justice involved Veterans to be connected to services and get their unmet clinical needs addressed. Studies have highlighted the importance of treatment in tandem with housing and employment assistance to ensure successful outcomes. [The Homeless Programs Office](#) and VJO Specialists work hard with community partners to fulfill these needs. The VA HPO maintains a listing

and provides contact information for [VJO Specialists at VA facilities nationwide](#). Although VJO Specialists cannot provide legal services, Veterans have access to resources and free legal

VA Medical Centers with Veteran Justice Outreach Specialists



clinics hosted at many facilities that Specialists and other local VAMC staff coordinate with local organizations and legal professionals. Every VA Medical Center has at least one VJO Specialist to assist Veterans. The VA also partnered with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the National Institute of Corrections and Bureau of Justice Assistance to establish the Justice Involved Veterans Network (JIVN). JIVN's purpose is to identify gaps in services and improve outcomes for Veterans who become involved in the justice system.

Access more information on the [Veterans Outreach Program](#) and the [Justice Involved Veterans Network](#).

For more information about the Office of Health Equity visit: <https://www.va.gov/healthequity/>

References:

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U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Homeless Programs Office, Veterans Justice Outreach Program, *Veteran Treatment Courts and other Veteran-focused courts served by Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists* [Fact sheet]. <https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/VJO/Veterans-Treatment-Court-Inventory-Update-Fact-Sheet-Jan-2021.pdf>