

SUPPORTING VETERANS IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

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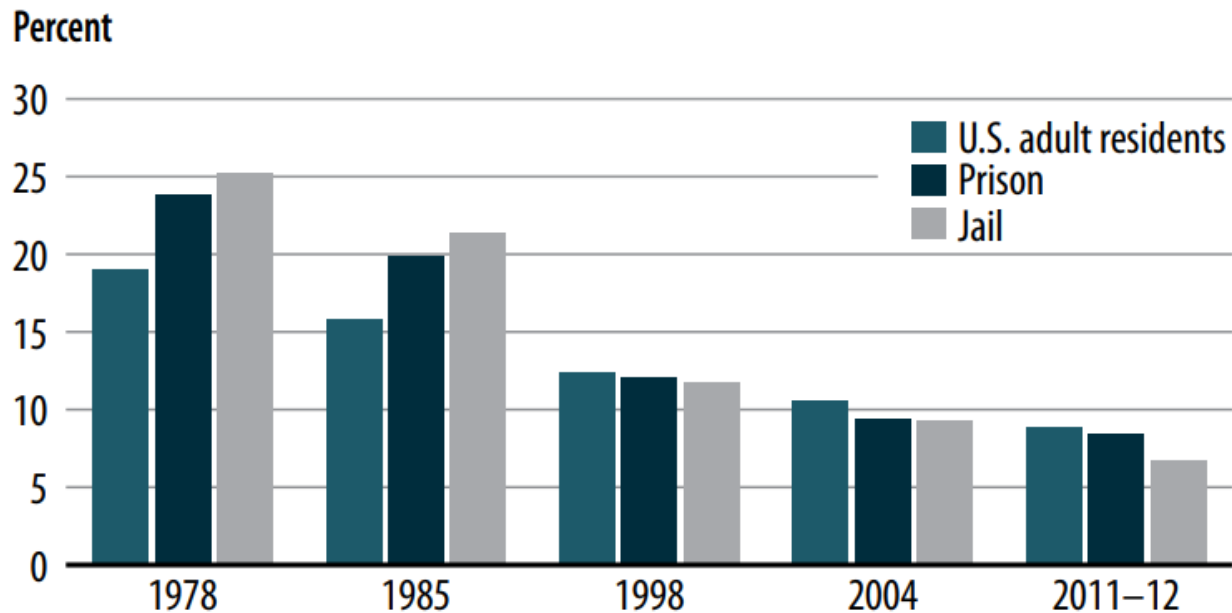
Objectives

- What do we know about Veterans in the criminal justice system?
- VJP's Mission and Vision
- Current outreach landscape
- Identifying Veterans
- Accessing VA services
- Ongoing Equity and Inclusion Work in VHA Homeless Programs/VJP



Veterans in Prison and Jail

Estimated percent of Veterans in the U.S. resident population in prison and jail, 1978, 1985, 1998, 2004, and 2011-12



Note: For years in which prison or jail inmates were not surveyed, the total prison or jail population was multiplied by the veteran distribution from the most recent survey. See *Methodology*.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics data collections on prison and jail inmates and U.S. Census Bureau population data collections. See table 1 for complete list.



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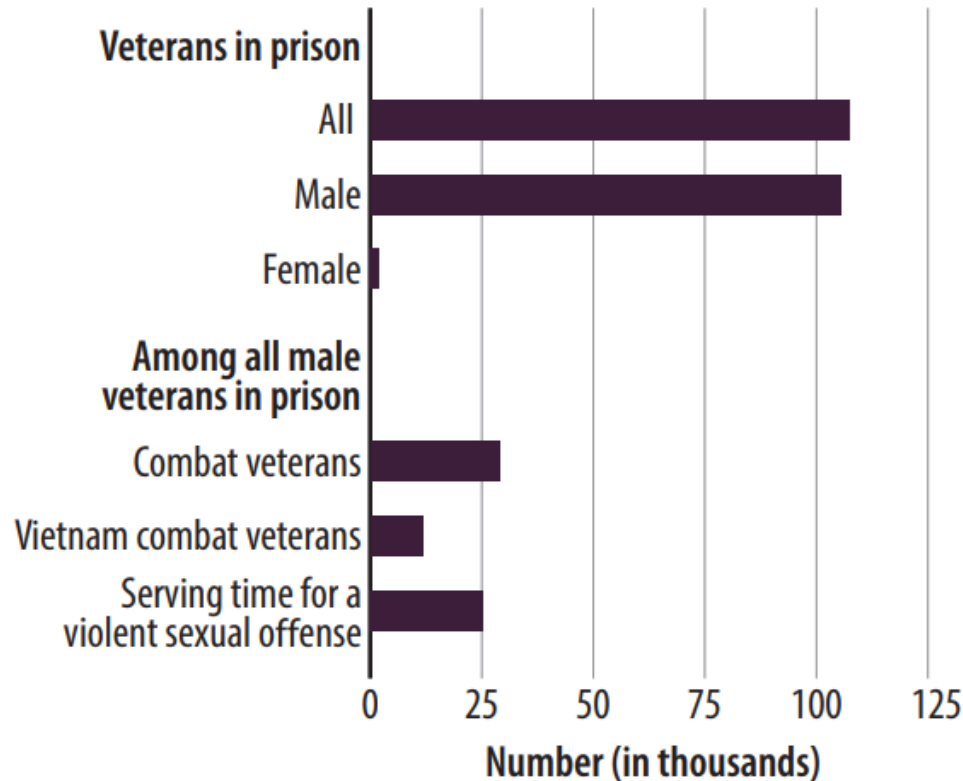
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Veterans in Prison

Estimated number of all Veterans in state or federal prison and number of all male Veterans, by selected characteristics, 2016



Note: See table 1 for counts and standard errors.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016.



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Homelessness Risk

Incarceration as an adult male is the single highest risk factor of ever being homeless (NSHAPC/Burt, 1996)

“Lengthy periods of incarceration in remote locations often attenuate the social and family ties that are crucial for successful reentry into the community.” (p. 9-5).

“...(E)ven short term incarcerations may disrupt lives and interfere with the ability to maintain employment and housing.” (p. 9-6).

(Metraux, Roman, and Cho on prison reentry/jail stays, National Symposium on Homelessness Research, 2007)



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Clinical Characteristics of Justice-Involved Veterans Served by VJP

- Most Veterans seen in VJP have a mental health (67%) or substance use disorder (52%) diagnosis, or both (44%).*
- In Fiscal Year 2019:
 - 11% of Veterans seen in Veterans Justice Outreach had an SUD diagnosis*
- Veterans seen in Veterans Justice Outreach face a higher suicide risk compared to other VA Veteran patients.**

*Finlay, A. K., Blue-Howells, J., Stimmel, M., Yu, M., Stewart, K. & Clark, S. (2020). Veterans Justice Program: Connecting Veterans with Veterans Health Administration Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Treatment [Fact Sheet 2020]. Menlo Park, CA: Center for Innovation to Implementation. (Updated 07/09/2020)

**Palframan KM, Blue-Howells J, Clark SC, McCarthy JF. Veterans Justice Programs: Assessing Population Risks for Suicide Deaths and Attempts. *Suicide Life Threat Behav.* 2020 Aug;50(4):792-804. doi: 10.1111/sltb.12631. Epub 2020 Mar 9. PMID: 32147866.

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.*
- In 2019, among the average 17.2 Veteran suicides per day, an estimated 6.8 suicides per day were among those with VHA encounters in 2018 or 2019, whereas 10.4 per day were among Veterans with no VHA encounter in 2018 or 2019.**
 - This means – we need the community’s help connecting with our most vulnerable Veterans.

*Holliday, R., Hoffmire, C. A., Martin, W. B., Hoff, R. A., & Monteith, L. L. (2021). Associations between justice involvement and PTSD and depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempt among post-9/11 veterans. Psychological Trauma.

**NATIONAL VETERAN SUICIDE PREVENTION ANNUAL REPORT | SEPTEMBER 2021



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

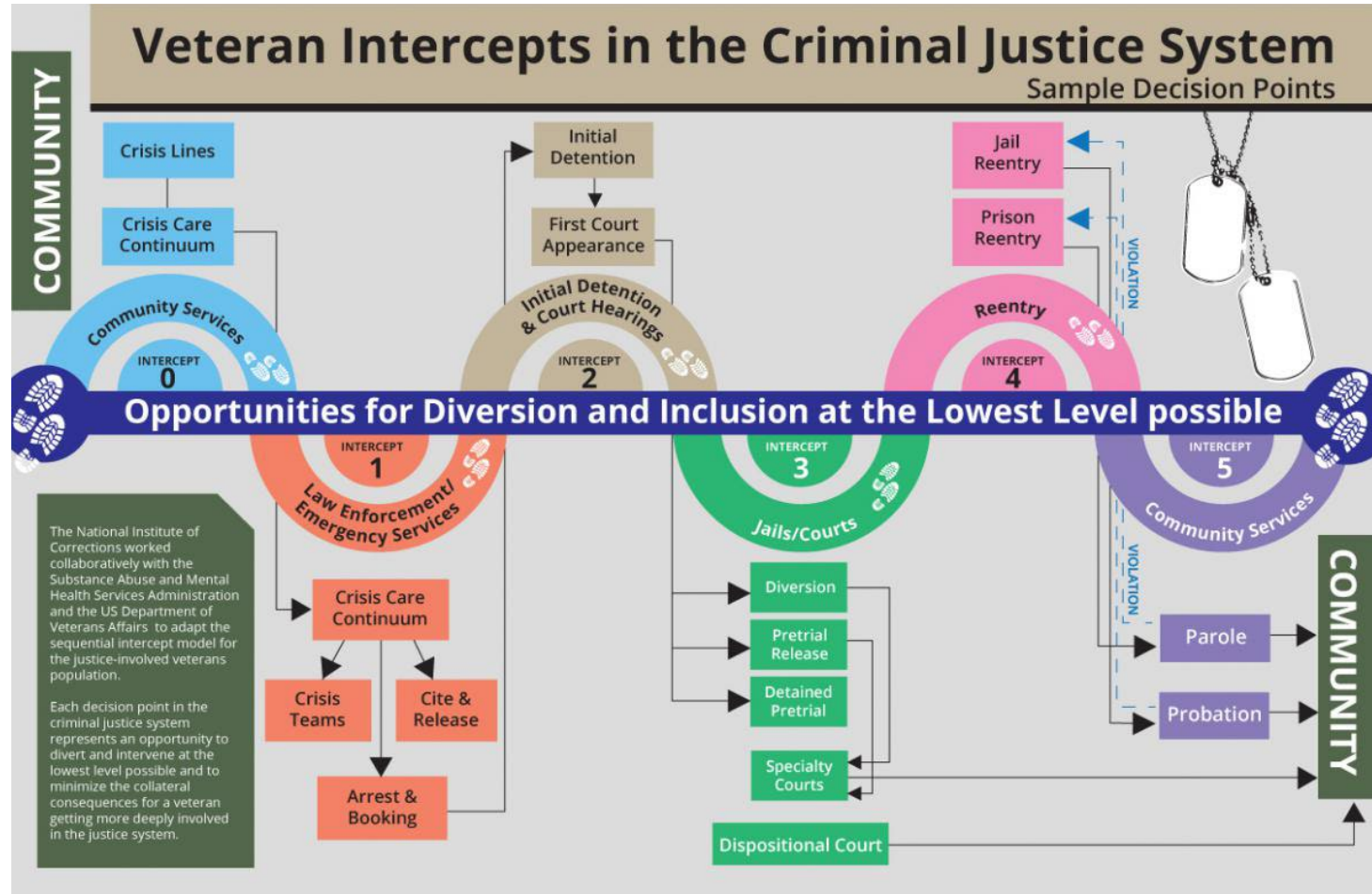
- Every justice-involved Veteran will have access to the care, services and other benefits to help him or her maximize their potential for success and stability in the community, including by avoiding homelessness and ending their involvement in the justice system.



Limits on VA Services for Incarcerated Veterans

- 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

Veteran Intercepts in the Criminal Justice System



[Veteran Intercepts in the Criminal Justice System | Justice Involved Veterans \(nicic.gov\)](https://www.nicic.gov/)

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 Specialists funded: 420
 - Number of local jail facilities serviced: 2,007
 - Number of Veterans receiving VJO services, fiscal year (FY) 2022: 39,591

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
-
- Number of state and federal prisons serviced: 1,070
 - Number of incarcerated Veterans receiving reentry services, FY 2022: 6,574



A Jail Outreach Story

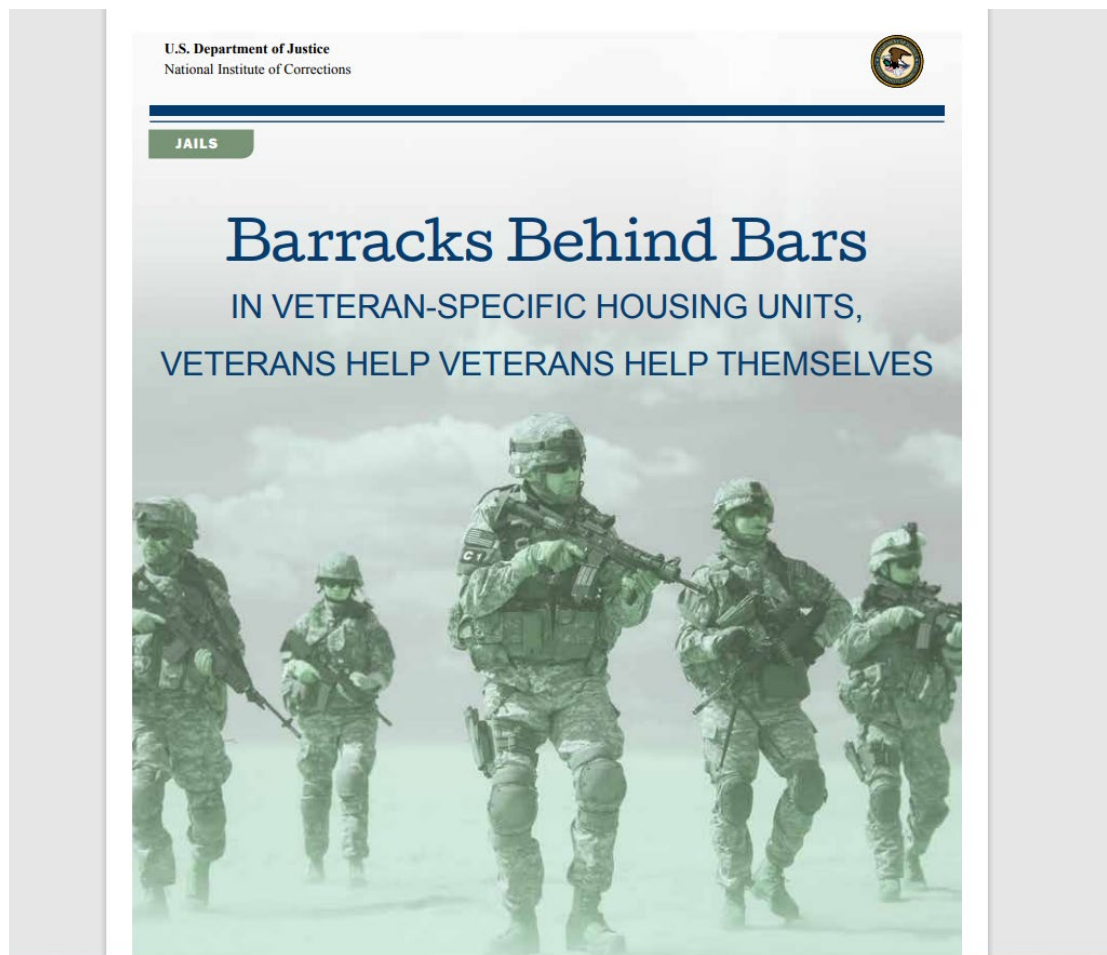
Back on their feet



□ Henry Molden, Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist at the Michael DeBakey VA Medical Center in Houston, Texas talks with Veterans in the county jail.

[Back on their feet - VA INSIDER](#)

Veteran Specific Housing Units



[Barracks-Behind-Bars-508.pdf \(nicic.gov\)](#)



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One Re-Entry Veteran's Story

“I wouldn't be where I am today without VA”



“I wouldn't be where I am today without VA” -
VA INSIDER

VA Partnership with Veterans Treatment Courts

- Veterans Treatment Courts:
 - Hybrid Drug and Mental Health Treatment Courts, serving Veteran defendants
 - Volunteer Veteran Mentors
 - 626 courts operating in 48 states and one territory
- VA Contributions:
 - VJO Specialist on treatment team; in the 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 for VTCs



A Veterans Treatment Court Story

VETERAN SPOTLIGHT



Navy Veteran
Billy Truesdell

[Former homeless Veteran Billy Truesdell's true colors shine through - VA News](#)



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The Gift of Recovery in one VTC

Home / Health

VA helped Veteran Kevin Rumley. Now he helps others.



Rumley still interacts with VA's justice and treatment programs daily as the director of Buncombe County Veterans Treatment Court. While Veterans feel strongly connected to Rumley based on their shared experiences, the Marine Corps Veteran is vigilant in ensuring he treats each Veteran with the unique treatment approach they deserve.

[VA helped Veteran Kevin Rumley. Now he helps others. - VA News](#)



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Community Interventions at the “Earliest Possible Points”

- “Deflection—the proposition that the best way to support individuals with substance use and co-occurring disorders is to deflect them away from traditional law enforcement involvement and *toward treatment and recovery services.*”*
- [*IIR Model Deflection Law April 2022.pdf \(cossapresources.org\)](#)

What Can a VJO Specialist Do in Partnership with Deflection Initiatives?

- Facilitate access to VA services at the earliest possible point in the Veteran's criminal justice involvement.
 - Assist local partners in identifying veterans and determining eligibility for VHA services.
 - Conduct outreach, assessment, and case management for Veterans engaged with local law enforcement.
 - Provide/coordinate training for law enforcement personnel regarding Veteran specific needs and VA services.
 - Link to VA and community services/resources

VJP Partnerships with Local VA Police and Community Law Enforcement

- Wilmington, DE: Veterans Response Team
- Cincinnati, OH: Military Liaison Group/Veteran Response Program
- Coatesville, PA: Veterans Response Team
- Bedford, MA: Veteran Crisis Intervention for First Responders
- Local VA/VJO participation in Crisis Intervention Team trainings.
- More coming!



Veterans Response Team, Coatesville, PA

Prevention, not prison



Prevention, not prison - VA INSIDER



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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?



Identifying Veterans

- 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.



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
- The system is designed to enable outreach specialists involved with VA's Health Care for Re-Entry Veterans (HCRV) program (prison populations), and Veteran Justice Outreach (VJO) ("front end" jails and court populations) program to identify Veterans as early as possible and get them linked to VA services upon their release. Both programs are focused on preventing homelessness among justice-involved Veterans.



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— California Dept. of Corrections and Rehabilitation houses about 100,000 prisoners. By self-reporting, 2.7% 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 is VRSS?

- **What is VRSS?**
 - VRSS is an online tool that allows external users (prison, jail, and court staff users) to identify the individuals in their facility who have a record of military service.
- **How it works:**
 - An external user logs into VRSS and uploads a file with basic information on their population (prison/jail inmates, or criminal defendants).
 - After allowing 2 hours for processing, the user receives a result file that identifies those individuals included in the original uploaded file who have a record of military service.
 - Matches are identified through a query mechanism that checks the record against the VA DoD Identity repository (VADIR), the VA's copy of the DoD's Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS).
 - At the same time, another version of the results file is sent to the VA VJO or HCRV specialist responsible for the facility/geographic area.



- VRSS video



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, DOB, SSN, 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 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



VRSS Access

- Visit the [VRSS website](#) to apply for access



VHA

- The largest integrated health care system in the country.
- VHA manages:
 - 1,255 health care facilities,
 - including 170 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.



Outcomes: What Do We Know So Far?

- Recent research by a VA investigator demonstrated that in FY 2021:
 - Within one year of their VJO outreach visit, 92% of Veterans with mental health diagnoses had at least one VHA mental health visit, averaging 13 visits in that year.
 - Within the same timeframe, 66% of VJO Veterans with substance use disorder diagnoses had at least one VHA substance use disorder visit, averaging 12 visits in that year.



Get Connected

- Locate your nearest VJO Specialist:
 - [Veterans Justice Outreach Program - VA Homeless Programs](#)
- Locate your nearest HCRV Specialist:
 - [Health Care for Re-entry Veterans Services and Resources - VA Homeless Programs](#)
- Find your nearest VA Healthcare Facility:
 - [Find VA Locations | Veterans Affairs](#)



Veterans in Prison (BJS, 2016)

TABLE 2
Demographic characteristics of state and federal prisoners, by veteran status, 2016

Characteristic	State prisoners				Federal prisoners			
	Veterans		Non-veterans*		Veterans		Non-veterans*	
	Percent	Standard error	Percent	Standard error	Percent	Standard error	Percent	Standard error
All prisoners	7.9%	0.33%	92.1%	0.33%	5.3%	0.69%	94.7%	0.69%
Sex								
Male	98.2% †	0.32%	92.4%	0.44%	97.9% †	0.46%	93.6%	0.80%
Female	1.8 †	0.32	7.6	0.44	2.1 †	0.46	6.4	0.80
Male prisoners only								
Race/ethnicity								
White ^a	50.1% †	1.84%	28.9%	1.04%	50.1% †	4.30%	18.5%	2.09%
Black ^a	22.7 †	1.64	36.0	1.28	23.9 †	4.04	33.5	3.32
Hispanic	10.1 †	0.99	22.0	0.99	12.1 †	2.50	38.8	4.59
American Indian/ Alaskan Native ^a	2.2	0.54	1.3	0.21	1.0 †	0.49	1.7	0.50
Asian/Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander ^a	0.9 †	0.32	1.0	0.14	1.1 †	0.80	1.6	0.39
Two or more races ^a	14.1 †	1.21	10.8	0.39	11.8 †	2.02	6.0	0.70
Age								
18-24	0.8% †!	0.25%	11.3%	0.74%	0.5% †!	0.33%	4.9%	0.55%
25-34	12.0 †	1.17	33.5	0.78	12.9 †	2.37	29.0	1.26
35-44	15.4 †	1.22	27.1	0.49	14.2 †	2.94	35.9	1.03
45-54	24.0 †	1.42	18.0	0.60	31.2 †	3.12	20.8	0.99
55-64	31.0 †	1.55	8.1	0.37	26.3 †	3.13	7.2	0.90
65 or older	16.8 †	1.35	2.0	0.19	15.0 †	2.61	2.1	0.38
Mean	52.3 yrs. †	0.48 yrs.	37.9 yrs.	0.29 yrs.	51.3 yrs. †	1.15 yrs.	39.8 yrs.	0.48 yrs.

Note: Details may not sum to totals due to rounding. See appendix table 1 for prisoner estimates.

*Comparison group.

†Difference with the comparison group is significant at the 95% confidence level.

! Interpret data with caution. Estimate is based on 10 or fewer sample cases, or coefficient of variation is greater than 50%.

^aExcludes persons of Hispanic origin (e.g., "white" refers to non-Hispanic whites and "black" refers to non-Hispanic blacks).

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016.



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Veterans in Prison (cont.)

TABLE 4
Military characteristics of male veterans in state and federal prison, 2016

Characteristic	State prison		Federal prison	
	Percent	Standard error	Percent	Standard error
Branch of service^a				
Air Force	10.6%	0.95%	11.2%	2.07%
Army	55.9	1.69	53.4	3.34
Marine Corps	14.6	1.12	14.5	2.07
Navy	20.3	1.48	24.1	2.65
Coast Guard	1.3	0.31	1.4!	0.74
Combat experience^b				
None	71.8%	1.45%	79.4%	2.99%
Combat veteran	28.2	1.45	20.6	2.99
Combat by conflict^{a,c}				
Korea	0.7!	0.42	0.7!	0.68
Vietnam	41.3	3.24	36.3	7.73
Persian Gulf	18.8	2.41	27.4	6.03
Afghanistan	16.3	2.93	21.4	6.70
Iraq	27.6	3.02	22.1	5.10
Other ^d	36.3	3.23	40.0	6.26
Type of discharge				
Honorable	58.9%	1.40%	66.0%	3.56%
General under honorable conditions	15.3	1.02	11.0	2.22
General without honorable conditions	2.4	0.49	0.6!	0.59
Other than honorable	10.0	0.88	12.1	2.26
Dishonorable/bad conduct	6.2	0.91	5.1	1.74
Other ^e	7.2	0.78	5.1	2.13
Length of military service				
Less than 3 years	38.1%	1.56%	30.9%	3.20%
3 years to less than 5 years	31.1	1.62	32.1	3.30
5 years or more	30.8	1.60	37.0	3.49

Note: Details may not sum to totals due to rounding. See appendix table 1 for prisoner estimate

! Interpret data with caution. Estimate is based on 10 or fewer sample cases, or coefficient of variation is greater than 50%.

^aPrisoners could select more than one response.

^bIncludes prisoners who self-reported having experienced combat in a line or combat unit during their military service.

^cNo prisoner reported seeing combat in World War II. Percentages are based on the number of combat veterans.



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Other Than Honorable Discharges and Equity

- **Combat exposure** is 25% greater (Elbogen et al., 2018)
- 100,000 **LGBTQ** Veterans were discharged with bad paper from 1945-2011
- There have been **racial disparities** in the imposition of bad paper discharges (DOD, 1972)
 - From 2006-2015, Black servicemembers were 1.3-2.6 X as likely as Whites to have disciplinary action taken against them (Protect Our Defenders, 2017)
- The GAO found that similar service histories in **different service branches** led to different types of discharge (GAO, 1980)

Meyer, 2023



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RACIAL EQUITY AND RACIAL JUSTICE WORKGROUP OVERVIEW

Historically, Black and American Indian / Alaska Native Veterans have been overrepresented in the homeless Veteran population AND the justice-involved Veteran population

The Homeless Programs Office (HPO) established the **Racial Equity and Racial Justice (RERJ) Workgroup** to achieve three primary goals:

1. Identify and remove any racial or ethnic disparities in access or outcomes for services provided by VHA specialty Homeless Programs.
2. Support VHA homeless program staff as they navigate issues pertaining to race and ethnicity in the workplace.
3. Increase competency and capacity for providers to deliver direct patient care that is free of racism and supports Veterans in navigating their own challenges, traumas and issues related to race and ethnicity.

Veterans Justice Programs (VJP) established our own **VJP Racial Equity and Justice Council** to advise on program-level initiatives and provide support directly to VJP staff working in correctional and other criminal justice settings



Racial Equity and Racial Justice Workgroup Overview

Core Values:

- Ensuring racial equity is key to ending Veteran homelessness.
- For HPO and VJP, this means embedding concepts of racial equity and racial justice into its core values.
- Workgroup efforts work across all HPO program offices to surface opportunities for improvement at the national, Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN), and local levels.

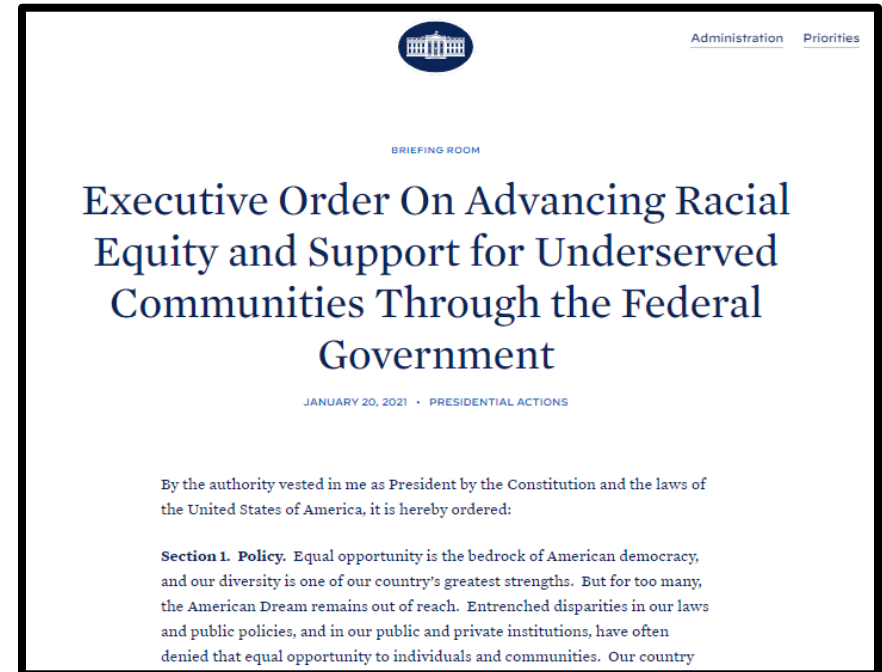
Milestones:

- Conducted an organizational assessment to identify the current status of HPO and currently using the recommendations in planning for next steps.
- Develop and launch a racial equity dashboard and quality improvement initiative to identify and address disparities in access and outcomes for Veterans engaged in VA homeless programs.
- Provides ongoing educational offerings for staff to ensure competency understanding of racial justice and equity.
- Developed a mentorship network for local homeless program staff.



Synergy with Executive Order 13985

- Executive Order 13985, officially titled Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government, is the first executive order signed by U.S. President Joe Biden on January 20, 2021.
- It advances racial equity and support for underserved communities through the federal government.



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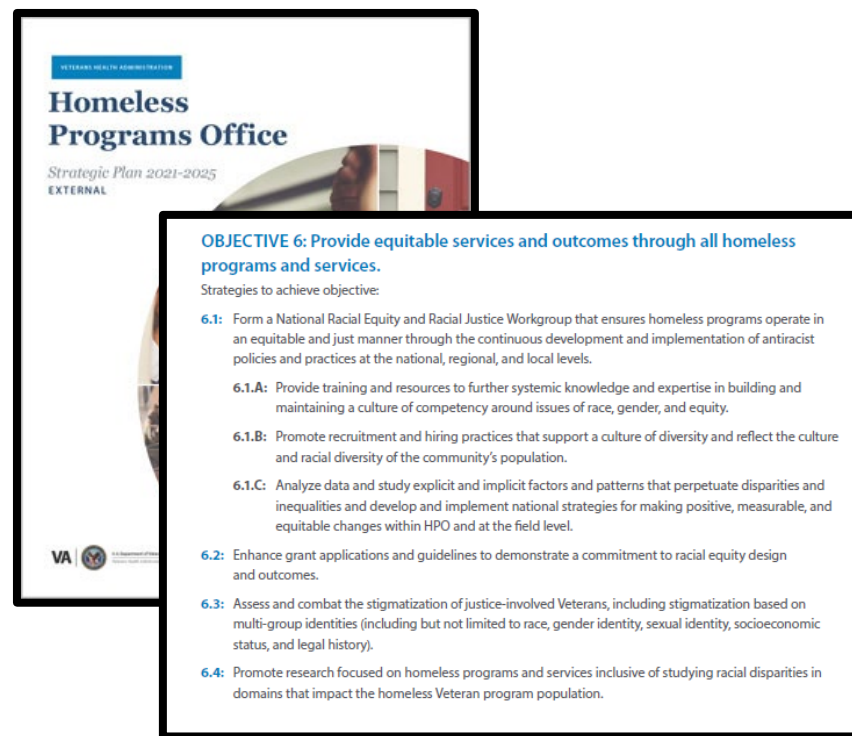
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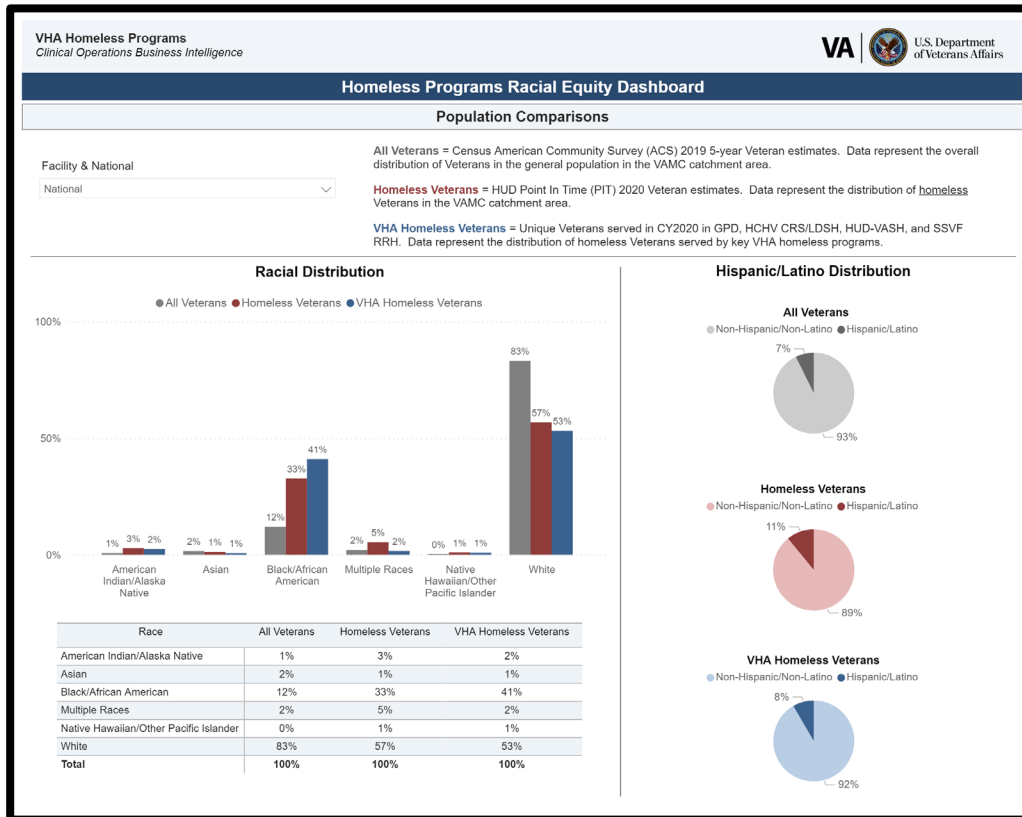
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Synergy with HPO's Strategic Plan

- The new 2021 – 2025 Homeless Programs Office Strategic Plan outlines its vision for the future and highlights the path to achieve the ambitious goal of ending homelessness among Veterans and their families.
- The plan includes six fundamental objectives and their associated strategies for the future.



Grounding our Work with Data



- The VHA Homeless Programs Racial Equity Dashboard assists with the measuring population segments by providing disaggregated race and ethnicity information on:
 - Total populations.
 - Access to services.
 - Exit outcomes.
 - Lengths of time in programs or in housing processes.
- These reports display information at the national, VISN, and local levels.

Connect with VA, Community Partners

- Collaboration with system and community partners is effective in understanding group-based factors.
- Expand the definition of community and partners to ensure representation from persons with lived expertise, BIPOC grassroots organizations, LGBTQ+ organizations, Civil Rights activists, etc.
 - Gain valuable insights and creative solutions: Persons with lived expertise of homelessness.
 - Understand the experience the data is demonstrating.

“Those closest to the problem are closest to the solution” – Glenn E. Martin



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Program Specific Example: Veterans Justice Programs VAMC Strategic Planning Tool:

Goal Four: Establish a local plan to address disparities in service delivery and outcomes of justice-involved Veterans.

- **Step One:** Identify training and resources to further systemic knowledge and expertise in building and maintaining a culture of competency around race, gender, disability, age and equity issues.
- **Step Two:** Identify opportunities to provide training to internal and external partners to address stigma and bias related to justice-involved Veterans, including those with intersectional identities (e.g., Black female Veteran).
- **Step Three:** Collect and analyze data and study explicit and implicit factors and patterns that perpetuate disparities and inequalities.
- **Step Four:** Develop strategies to routinely solicit and incorporate feedback from Veterans with lived expertise and experience.
- **Step Five:** Develop a plan and strategies for making positive, measurable, and equitable changes within VJP and at the field level.
- **Step Six:** Identify gaps.
- **Step Seven:** Identify Needed Resources to implement plans.



Program Specific Example: Veterans Justice Programs VAMC Strategic Planning Tool

AutoSave Off VJP Workbook Companion Tool 04.06.23 Search (Alt+Q) Stimmel, Matthew A. (he/him/his)

File Home Insert Draw Page Layout Formulas Data Review View Help Acrobat Comments Share

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	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
25	✓ Step Three: Collect and analyze data and study explicit and implicit factors and patterns that perpetuate disparities and inequalities.								
26	Identify Data Sources			Assess Current Local Strengths and Opportunities					
27									
28	Source	Data Type	Disaggregation	Frequency of Reports	Description				
29									
30									
31									
32									
33									
34	✓ Step Four: Develop strategies to routinely solicit and incorporate feedback from Veterans with lived expertise and experience.								
35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify potential partnerships with Veterans who have lived expertise and experience with justice involvement. 								
36	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that Veterans with lived expertise and experience receive compensation. It is important that persons with lived experience are appropriately compensated for contributing their time, energy, and valuable expertise. 								
37									
38									
39	Identifying Potential Partners with Lived Expertise and Experience								
40	Partners	Existing Collaboration	Appropriate Compensation Available?	Notes					

Ready Accessibility: Investigate + 100%



Equity and Inclusion: Key Points

- Assessing a question of equity begins with **collecting data** (see National Drug Court Resource Center's [Equity and Inclusion Assessment Tool](#))
- Data collection and analysis is central to VA's own equity work
- **Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists can assist** court partners as they assess issues of equity and inclusion in their programs/systems



Resources

- National Institute of Corrections, Justice Involved Veterans Microsite: [Home | Justice Involved Veterans \(nicic.gov\)](#)
 - Veteran Intercepts in the Criminal Justice System Webinar
 - Supporting Transition to Civilian Life Across the Sequential Intercept Model
 - Barracks Behind Bars I and II
 - Respecting Service, Restoring Honor for Vets in Crisis



Resources

- [Veterans Treatment Courts and other Veteran-focused courts served by VA Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists Fact Sheet](#)
- [Identifying-the-Veteran-Population-Within-the-CJS-2022.pdf \(justiceforvets.org\)](#)



Additional Resources

- Veterans Crisis Line
 - 988 and Press 1
 - Text 838255
 - <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/chat>
- National Call Center for Homeless Veterans
 - 1-877-424-3838

