



A GUIDEBOOK FOR VETERANS INCARCERATED IN TEXAS

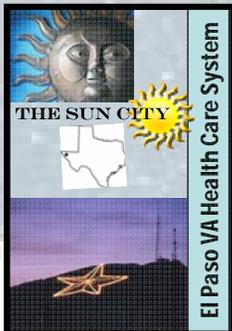
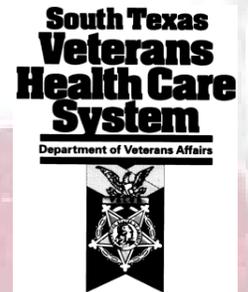
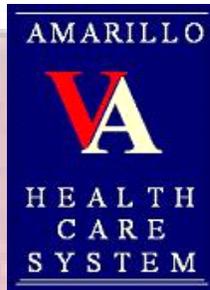


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FORWARD

This handbook can be an important tool. Review all of the programs thoroughly to understand the opportunities available. When these programs are used properly, the benefits will be a minimization of the outside pressures you may be confronted when released. These resources may assist you in establishing social acceptance, economic security, and your new place as a productive member of society.

This booklet is a tool for incarcerated veterans and their families who wish access services to support a new and better way of life. Be aware that this guidebook is designed to assist veterans incarcerated in the State of Texas, and their families. Laws do vary from state to state; therefore, check your state laws and regulations against this guide. The guidebook may found on the internet at http://vaww1.va.gov/homeless/docs/IV_Texas.pdf.

Agency staff names and addresses, phone numbers and website addresses change. If you attempt to contact one of the resources in this guidebook and it is not current, do your best to obtain the current information through phone information or a Google web search. To perpetuate the value of this document, we respectfully request that if you discover any incorrect, conflicting, or out-of-date information in this Guidebook, please send any discrepancies and updated information to:

Warren Pearson, warren.pearson@va.gov
Healthcare for Re-Entry Veterans Specialist

We would like to recognize and thank: 1) the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans which provided basic concepts and core information for this guide through its "Planning for Your Release" guide funded by the U.S. Department of Labor; 2) the Veterans Incarcerated Workgroup of Walla Walla, Washington, for the concept of state-specific information in its "Guidebook for Incarcerated Veterans" and for allowing the use of its guide as a template for this publication; 3) Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc. for developing the first incarcerated veterans guidebook, which has inspired and informed subsequent efforts; and 4) any public domain and agency resources included in the guidebook.

Revised: June 18, 2009

SECTION I

USING THIS GUIDE AND SEEKING HELP

This guide was developed for you to use 6 months prior to your release and to keep as a reference after your release. It includes addresses, phone numbers, and web sites that you can use to find out about programs and other help available after your release. You may want to ask a friend or family member to help you find the information you need if you do not have phone or internet access. **Keep in mind that this guide does not include all of the services available.** What is available in one area may be different from what is available in another, so be sure to check with local resources to learn about services in your area.

While you are in prison, find out which unit in your facility can help you plan for your release (often the education or transfer unit). Classes may be offered so you can work on skills development and prepare for life after release. **You do not want to risk homelessness once you are released, so take advantage of the opportunities available to you.**

Begin thinking about what specifically you will need upon release. Ask yourself these kinds of questions: Will I need housing? Will I need medical, substance abuse, or mental health care? Do I need to learn a job skill? Do I have any other legal issues, such as child support? How do I restart my VA checks or Supplemental Security Income (SSI)?

Make a list of your needs. Remember that this is just a tool to help you get organized. A sample list might look like this:

- I need a place to live.
- I need a job.
- I need clothing to wear to work.
- I need to find out what benefits I can get as a veteran.
- I want to get addictions treatment.
- I owe child support.

Think about your list as you read this guide. Who do you think can help you with each of your needs? Is there one organization that may be able to work with you, on many different things, or do you need to contact several agencies? Keep track of the steps you take, including the dates and names of people you contact for information or assistance. Although this guide provides *national and state* addresses for many organizations, we recommend you **check your phone book for local, county, and state agencies that know what help is available in your area**. When writing a letter to request information, **be clear**. Keep your letter short, to the point, and write legibly. Include the following information:

- Your name, social security number and contact information.
- A brief statement about your current situation.
- Your specific request.
- What you have done so far (Example: I have written to X organization and they suggested I contact you).
- Any restrictions for mailings (Example: Mail with staples or paper clips will not be accepted by my prison facility).

When contacting an agency for help by mail, email, or phone. It pays to be persistent but polite. Ask questions if information is not clear to you. Remember that many organizations are staffed by volunteers who are eager to help but may not have the answers you are looking for. **If someone cannot help you, ask about who can.**

The Internet can also be helpful to find information about VA benefits and community resources in your area. This guide includes web addresses, when available. If computer access is not available at your facility, you can visit the public library after release. Computer access may also be provided at Workforce and Workforce Affiliate sites, Workforce Development Council member locations, and Employment Security Department offices (referred to as Job Service Centers or Unemployment Offices).

SECTION II

HELP FOR VETERANS

This section includes resources that can help you get back on your feet. Remember to check the phone book for local, county, and state agencies that know what services are available in the area to assist you. Some organizations may have waiting lists, require an interview, or have specific rules about whom they serve. **It is best if you start asking about services and requirements now**, so that you will be prepared when you are released. You may even ask if your name can be put on a waiting list when you get closer to your release date. Unfortunately, the VA does not have programs an inmate can parole to.

TOLL-FREE NUMBERS

Crisis and other toll-free numbers are often listed in the front cover or first pages of the phone book. You may also want to check under "Social Services" in the blue or yellow pages for hotlines and local numbers.

- **U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs** — www.va.gov or www.myhealth.va.gov/
 - ✓ [Information on Medical Centers: 1-877-222-8387, or www2.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp?isFlash=1](#)
 - ✓ VA Suicide Hotline - 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or go to: www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/Veterans/
- **Veterans Affairs Regional Offices:**
 - ✓ 6900 Almeda Rd., Houston, TX 77030 Main Number 1-800-827-1000
701 Clay Ave, Waco TX 76799 Main Number 1-800-827-1000
 - ✓ Persian Gulf War Helpline: 1-800-749-8387
- **Focus On Recovery Helpline** - A 24-hour national alcohol and drug abuse addiction and treatment hotline: 1-800-888-9383
- **National AIDS Hotline** - Talk to someone who knows about HIV / AIDS and can tell you about AIDS services in your city or state: 1-800-822-7422
- **National Coalition for Homeless Veterans** - call 1-800-838-4357 or go to: www.nchv.org
- **National Veterans Foundation** – call 1-888-777-4443 or go to: www.nvf.org/

WHERE TO START

Check the local phone book yellow pages under "Homeless" or "Social Service Organizations" for a list of many local organizations that offer different services, which may include clothing, public transportation tokens, emergency shelter, and more. You may need to contact several agencies to find all the services you need. Services provided by *government* agencies are listed in the blue pages found near the front of the phone book. Check with your local Public Assistance Office to find out what programs are available and what their guidelines are. We have included some guidance below, but your local organizations are your best resources. **Remember, it never hurts to ask!**

The Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) have developed a working definition of chronic homelessness: "an unaccompanied adult homeless individual with a disabling condition who has either been continuously homeless for a year or more or has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years." This definition is significant because it focuses national attention on those with the greatest needs.

- Every **VA Medical Center** has a **Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) Coordinator** who is responsible for helping homeless veterans access VA and community-based care to end homelessness among veterans. The HCHV program provides outreach, clinical assessments and referrals for medical and mental health care, long-term transitional residential assistance, case management and employment assistance with linkage to permanent housing. To locate your nearest HCHV Coordinator, call 1-877-222-8387 or go to: www1.va.gov/homeless/
- **The Department of Veterans Affairs** provides assistance with Veterans benefits and entitlements information, VA claims process, representation and advocacy, Trauma (PTSD) counseling, Veterans Homes for those in need of nursing care, and employment assistance through federal funded reintegration projects. Call 1-877-222-8387 or go to: www2.va.gov/directory/ to find the medical center nearest you. Call 1-800-827-1000 for the nearest VA benefits office.
- **The Health Care for Re-Entry Veterans Program** (HCRV) operates in all 50 states under the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care Administration. The program serves veterans who are incarcerated in State and Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) correctional facilities. The State of Texas is divided into three Veterans Integrated Service Networks or VISNs: VISNs 16, 17, & 18. Nationwide, there are 21 separate VISNs. Each VISN has a Re-Entry Specialist who coordinates services within

his/her respective Network, as well as with other Re-Entry Specialists across the nation. In Texas, the Re-Entry Specialists work in partnership with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and Parole/Probation to provide re-entry planning services to eligible veterans who are incarcerated. **Veterans cannot parole to the HCRV program.** Below are the HCRV Specialists for Texas:

VISN 16

David H. Sands, LCSW
(MH/HCHV-116)
2002 Holcombe
Houston, TX 77030
713-791-1414, Ext. 2321
Sands.DavidH@va.gov

VISN 17

Warren Pearson, LMSW (116B)
4800 Memorial Drive
Waco TX 76711
800-423-2111, Ext. 53699 or
254-297-3699
Warren.Pearson@va.gov

VISN 18

Danica Bogicevic, LCSW-C
650 E. Indian School Road
Phoenix, AZ 85012
800-554-7174, Ext. 7887 or
602-277-5551, Ext. 7887
Danica.Bogicevic@va.gov

Eileen Callejas, LMSW
(10N17/MH)
7400 Merton Minter Blvd.
San Antonio, TX 78229
866-560-6773, Ext. 68157 or
210-616-8157
Eileen.Callejas@va.gov

- **Texas Veterans Commission (TVC)** provides assistance with Veterans benefits & entitlements information, VA claims process, representation and advocacy, , Veterans Homes for those in need of nursing care, and employment assistance through federal funded reintegration projects. Call 1-800-252-VETS (8387) or go to: www.TVC.state.tx.us
- **National Coalition for the Homeless** has a directory of shelters and homeless assistance programs online. This does not list every program in the country, so be sure to check your phone book for local programs. The following are those listed for the State of Texas. Call 1-800-838-4357 or go to: www.nchv.org

Directory of Local Homeless Service Organizations

- **Salvation Army** provides services, including shelter and transitional housing, for homeless individuals and families. For local services and information, contact The Salvation Army nearest you or call 800-725-2769 (800-SAL-ARMY) or go to: www.salvationarmyusa.org/
- **United Way** provides a variety of services through local organizations. Check the phone book for a local post or locate local organizations online at www.unitedway.org or dial 2-1-1.

- **Texas Homeless Network** provides a directory of organizations providing assistance to homeless individuals. Call 1-800-531-0828 or go to: www.thn.org/
- **Local churches**, synagogues, mosques, temples, etc. **and community faith-based organizations**, such as charities, Salvation Army, and Volunteers of America, may have a variety of programs to assist you. Find these organizations by calling your county or city Department of Social Services. Check the blue pages of the phone book for the number.

HOUSING

It is important to know that you have a place to go when released. The first step in returning to the community is finding a place to stay. This section includes ways to locate emergency shelter, transitional programs, and permanent housing assistance. Transitional or temporary housing can serve as a step toward full independence upon your release. However, there are often waiting lists for housing assistance programs, so you should ask about applying as soon as possible. If you are released and find yourself homeless, emergency assistance is available.

Emergency and Transitional Housing

- To find out if there are homeless veteran service providers in your area, 1-800-VET-HELP, write to NCHV, 333 ½ Pennsylvania Ave., SE Washington, DC 20003-1148, or go to: www.nchv.org
- Look in the phone book **yellow pages** under "Social Service Organizations" for local shelters or organizations that may be able to help.
- Look in the phone book **blue pages** under local, city, or county government Department of Social Services or "Human Services" or call the County Commissioner's Office for information about local low-income housing coalitions or homeless advocacy groups who may know what is available.
- To find a list of emergency shelters for men, women and families in every state, check the **Department of Housing and Urban Development** online at: www.hud.gov/homeless/
- 2-1-1: The number to call when you don't know who to call.

If you need help with services listed below, just dial 211 or go to the 2-1-1 Texas website: www.211texas.org/211/ to find services in your area including:

- Food
- Utility bill assistance
- After-school programs
- Shelter
- Counseling
- Senior services
- Rent assistance
- Child care
- Disaster relief

Long-term or Permanent Housing

Public housing waiting lists can be long, but the length of time can vary from place to place. Even if you are not sure where you want to live yet, apply to get on the waiting list so that you have as many options as possible. To learn how to apply, contact the local housing authority listed in the phone book blue pages under "Local Government, Public Housing Authority."

- **Texas Low Income Housing Information Service** is an organization with the mission of supporting low-income Texans' efforts to have a decent home in a quality neighborhood. Contact them at 508 Powell Street, Austin, TX 78703-5122 or call 512-477-8910, extension 4, or go to: www.texashousing.org
- **Texas Department of State Health Services**
Contact them at P.O. Box 149347, Austin, Texas 78714-9347 or call 512-458-7111 or 1-888-963-7111 or go to: www.dshs.state.tx.us

FINDING & KEEPING A JOB

Finding a job may be hard and can seem overwhelming, but it is possible and very important! When released you may find that you are completely starting over. You should ask for job counseling and training while incarcerated so you are prepared to work when released. Don't wait until you get out to start thinking about what you will do. Start planning now!

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

- **Veterans Employment Representatives** (Texas Veterans Commission) and **Disabled Veterans Outreach Program specialist** assigned by the **State Employment**. Go to: www.tvc.state.tx.us/VERlocations.html

- **Texas Workforce Commission.** The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) is the state government agency charged with overseeing and providing workforce development services to employers and job seekers of Texas. For employers, TWC offers recruiting, retention, training and retraining, and outplacement services as well as valuable information on labor law and labor market statistics. For job seekers, TWC offers career development information, job search resources, training programs, and, as appropriate, unemployment benefits. While targeted populations receive intensive assistance to overcome barriers to employment all Texans can benefit from the services offered by TWC and our network of workforce partners. Go to: www.twc.state.tx.us/customers/jsemp/jsemp.html
- **Veterans Industries and Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) programs,** the VA offers structured work opportunities and supervised therapeutic housing for at-risk and homeless veterans with physical, mental health and addictions problems. VA contracts with private industry and the public sector for work by these veterans, who learn job skills, re-learn successful work habits, and regain a sense of self-esteem. Veterans are paid for their work and given assistance with employment in the community. For further information, contact the CWT coordinator at the nearest VA at 1-877-822-8387 or go to: www.cwt.va.gov/
- The State of Texas has a **Vocational Rehabilitation** program that helps people with disabilities find and keep jobs. Apply for these services **immediately** after your release. Look in the phone book blue pages under "Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS)," then "Vocational Rehabilitation," or search the internet for "Vocational Rehabilitation" in Texas or go to: www.dars.state.tx.us/drs/index.shtml
- **National H.I.R.E. Network** is an information resource for individuals with criminal histories seeking employment. Go to: www.hirenetwork.org

VA HEALTH CARE

We encourage you to enroll in the VA Health Benefits System as soon as you are released. Every **VA Medical Center** has a **Health Care for Homeless Veterans Coordinator** who helps veterans and their families find resources inside and outside the VA Health Care system. Call 1-877-222-8387 or go to: www1.va.gov/directory/guide/ to find the medical center nearest you.

Facility	Address	Phone
Abilene Outpatient Clinic	4225 Woods Place Abilene, TX 79602	325-695-3252
Amarillo VA Health Care System	6010 Amarillo Blvd., West Amarillo, TX 79106	806-355-9703 or 800-687-8262
Amarillo Vet Center	3414 E. Olsen Blvd., Ste. E Amarillo, TX 79109	806-354-9779
Beaumont Clinic	3420 Veterans Circle Beaumont, TX 77707	409-981-8550 or 800-833-7734
Beeville Family Practice	302 S Hillside Dr Beeville, TX 78102	361-358-9912
Brownwood CBOC	2600 Memorial Park Dr. Brownwood, TX 76801	325-641-0568
Bryan/College Station CBOC	1651 Rock Prairie Rd., Ste. 100 College Station, TX 77845	979-680-0361
Cedar Park CBOC	701 Whitestone Blvd. Cedar Park, TX 78613	512-260-1368
Central Texas Veterans Health Care System (CTVHCS) - Austin Outpatient Clinic	2901 Montopolis Dr. Austin, TX 78741	512-389-1010
CTVHCS - Olin E. Teague Veterans Center	1901 Veterans Memorial Dr. Temple, TX 76504	254-778-4811 or 800-423-2111
CTVHCS - Waco VA Medical Center	4800 Memorial Dr. Waco, TX 76711	254-752-6581 or 800-423-2111

Facility	Address	Phone
Charles Wilson VA Outpatient Clinic	1301 Frank Ave. Lufkin, TX 75901	936-637-1342 or 800-209-3120
Childress Clinic	1001 Hwy 83 North Childress, TX 79201	940-937-3636
Conroe Outpatient Clinic	800 Riverwood Ct., Suite 100 Conroe, TX 77304	936-522-4000
Corpus Christi Outpatient Clinic	5283 Old Brownsville Rd. Corpus Christi, TX 78405	361-806-5600
Denton Outpatient Clinic	2223 Colorado Blvd. Denton, TX 76205	940-202-2187
Eagle Pass Family Clinic	2176 E. Garrison Street, Suite C Eagle Pass, TX 78852	830-773-3353
El Paso VA Health Care System	5001 North Piedras St. El Paso, TX 79930-4211	915-564-6100 or 800-672-3782
El Paso Vet Center	1155 Westmoreland, Ste. 121 El Paso, TX 79925	915-772-0013
Frank M. Tejeda VA Outpatient Clinic	5788 Eckhert Rd. San Antonio, TX 78240	210-699-2100
Granbury – Acton Clinic	2006 Fall Creek Hwy. Granbury, TX 76049	817-326-3440
Houston Regional Office	6900 Almeda Rd., Houston, TX 77030	800-827-1000
Houston Vet Center	2990 Richmond, Suite 325 Houston, TX 77098	713-523-0884
Houston Vet Center	701 N. Post Oak Rd., Ste. 102 Houston, TX 77024	713-682-2288
Kerrville VA Medical Center	3600 Memorial Blvd. Kerrville, TX 78028	830-896-2020
Laredo Outpatient Clinic	6551 Star Court Laredo, TX 78041-9136	956-523-7850

Facility	Address	Phone
Longview Clinic	1205 E. Marshal Ave. Longview, TX 75601	903-247-8262 or 800-957-8262
Lubbock Clinic	6104 Avenue Q. South Dr. Lubbock, TX 79412	806-472-3400
Lubbock Vet Center	3208 34 th St. Lubbock, TX 79410	806-792-9782
McAllen Clinic	2101 S. Col. Rowe Blvd. McAllen, TX 78503	956-618-7100
Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center	2002 Holcombe Blvd. Houston, TX 77030-4298	713-791-1414 or 800-553-2278
Midland Vet Center	2817 W. Loop 250 N., Suite E Midland, TX 79707	432-697-8222
New Braunfels Clinic	189 E Austin, Suite 106 New Braunfels, TX 78130	830-629-3614
Northeast Texas Primary Care	635 Stone Ave. Paris, TX 75460	903-785-9900
VA North Texas Health Care System: Dallas VA Medical Center	4500 South Lancaster Rd. Dallas, TX 75216	214-742-8387 or 800-849-3597
VA North Texas Health Care System: Fort Worth Outpatient Clinic	300 W. Rosedale St. Fort Worth, TX 76104	817-335-2202 or 800-443-9672
VA North Texas Health Care System: Sam Rayburn Memorial Veterans Center	1201 E. 9th St. Bonham, TX 75418	903-583-2111 or 800-924-8387
Odessa Clinic	4141 N. Tanglewood, Suite 201 Odessa, TX 79762	432-550-0149
Palestine CBOC	2000 S. Loop 256, Suite 124 Palestine, TX 75801	903-723-9006
San Angelo Clinic	2018 Pulliam San Angelo, TX 76905	325-658-6138

Facility	Address	Phone
San Antonio Clinic General McMullen	1831 S. General McMullen San Antonio, TX 78226	210-434-1400
San Antonio Clinic Greenway	2455 NE Loop 410, Suite 100 San Antonio, TX 78217	210-599-6000
San Antonio Clinic Northern Hills	14100 Nacogdoches, Suite 116 San Antonio, TX 78217	210-653-8989
San Antonio Clinic Pecan Valley	4243 E Southcross, Suite 205 San Antonio, TX 78222	210-304-3500
Sherman Clinic	3811 US 75 N Sherman, TX 75090	903-487-0477
South Texas Veterans Health Care System	7400 Merton Minter Blvd. San Antonio, TX 78229	210-617-5300 or 888-686-6350
South Texas VA Health Care Center at Harlingen	2106 Treasure Hills Blvd. Harlingen, TX 78550	956-366-4500
Stamford Clinic	1303 Mabee Dr. Stamford, TX 79553	325-773-2710
Stratford Clinic	1220 Purnell Stratford, TX 79084	806-396-2852
Texas City Community Based Outpatient Clinic	9300 Emmett F. Lowry Expressway, Suite 206 Texas City, TX 77591	409-986-1129 or 800-310-5001
Tyler VA Primary Care Clinic	3414 Golden Rd. Tyler, TX 75701	903-590-3050
Victoria Clinic	1502 E. Airline Dr. Victoria, TX 77901	361-582-7700 or 877-867-2671
Waco Regional Office	One Veterans Plaza 701 Clay Ave. Waco, TX 76799	800-827-1000
West Texas VA Health Care System	300 Veterans Blvd. Big Spring, TX 79720	432-263-7361 or 800-472-1365

Facility	Address	Phone
Veterans Clinic of North Texas	1800 7th St. Wichita Falls, TX 76301	940-723-2373

If ineligible for veteran's benefits, free or low-cost health care may be available from the following sources:

- **Department of State and Health Services (DSHS)** can tell you where to find health care facilities for the homeless. Check the phone book blue pages under local, city, or county government for the number, or go to: www.dshs.state.tx.us/services.shtm, or dial 2-1-1.
- **National Health Care for the Homeless Council** has a list of health care providers working with homeless people across the nation. For a list of providers in your state, go to: www.nhchc.org.
- **Free clinics** are run by many local organizations and communities. Look in the phone book blue pages under "Public Health" to contact local government office for clinics in your area.

Special Health Information for Veterans:

- If you think you may be at risk for AIDS and HIV infection after your release, contact the nearest VA Medical Center to get tested, and seek counseling. Those at highest risk for AIDS and HIV infection are:
 - people who share needles or syringes to inject drugs or steroids;
 - men who have sex with other men;
 - those born to mothers who have HIV;
 - people who received blood transfusions before 1985;
 - anyone who has sex with anyone who is at risk for HIV / AIDS.
- Veterans, homeless, and incarcerated people are at high risk for **Hepatitis C (HCV)**, a serious disease that can cause cirrhosis (scarring of the liver) and liver cancer. If you think you are at risk after your release, contact the nearest VA Medical Center to get tested and seek HCV counseling.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

- **VA Medical Center Specialized PTSD Programs.** The Department of Veterans Affairs Vet Center program operates a system of community based counseling centers. The Vet Centers are staffed by small multi-disciplinary teams of dedicated providers, many of which are combat veterans themselves. Vet Center staff is available toll-free during normal business hours at 1-800-905-4675 (Eastern) and 1-866-496-8838 (Pacific).
- **Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD)** - A natural first question is whether symptoms experienced really are due to PTSD. Stress and trauma cause symptoms that are normal reactions and these symptoms may not be indicative of the full condition of PTSD. Similar symptoms may be due to conditions created by stressors other than trauma (for example, work or financial pressures), medical problems (such as heart conditions or diabetes), or other psychological conditions (such as depression or anxiety). Go to: www.mentalhealth.va.gov/.
- **For information on finding Medical Centers in your area, call 1-877-222-8387 or go to: www.va.gov/directory.**
- **VA Readjustment Counseling Service (Vet Centers).** Vet Centers provide readjustment counseling and outreach services to all veterans who served in any combat zone. Services are also available for their family members for military related issues. Veterans have earned these benefits through their service and all services are provided at no cost to the veteran or family. Call 1-800-905-4675.
- Contact the Homeless Veteran Services Coordinator at the local **VA Medical Center** or **Vet Center**. Call 1-877-222-8387 to or go to: www1.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp?isFlash=1 to find the medical center nearest you.

What is readjustment counseling?

Readjustment counseling is wide range of services provided to combat veterans in the effort to make a satisfying transition from military to civilian life. Services include individual counseling, group counseling, marital and family counseling, bereavement counseling, medical referrals, assistance in applying for VA Benefits, employment counseling, guidance and referral, alcohol/drug assessments, information and referral to community resources, military sexual trauma counseling and referral, and outreach and community education.

Does VA have readjustment counseling for family members?

Family members of combat veterans have been eligible for Vet Center readjustment counseling services for military related issues since 1979.

Am I eligible for Vet Center readjustment counseling?

If you, or a family member, served in any combat zone and received a military campaign ribbon (Vietnam, Southwest Asia, OEF, OIF, etc.) you are eligible for Vet Center services.

Where is counseling offered?

VA's readjustment counseling is provided at community-based Vet Centers located near veterans and their families. There is no cost for Vet Center readjustment counseling. Contact your nearest Vet Center through information provided in the Vet Center Directory or listings in your local blue pages. Vet Center staff are available toll-free during normal business hours at 1-800-905-4675 (Eastern) and 1-866-496-8838 (Pacific) or go to: www.vetcenter.va.gov/

If not eligible for veterans' benefits, the following sources may be able to tell you where you can go to get help:

- **National Alliance for the Mentally Ill** lists community mental health services providers at - www.nami.org, or call 1-800-950-6264.
- **National Mental Health Association** offers support groups, rehabilitation, socialization, and housing services through 340 community organizations located across the country. Call 1-800-969-NMHA, or find a local office online at - www.nmha.org
- **MHMR (Mental Health Mental Retardation) Community Centers.** Texans with mental illness, mental retardation, substance addictions and developmental disabilities have access to a well-funded, organized system of quality services and support that are responsive to individual choice and managed through a public system of community MHMR centers governed by volunteer trustees appointed by local government officials.

Look in your local phone book "**blue pages**" for the Mental Health & Mental Retardation center near you or call the Austin number for assistance.

Westpark Building 3, Suite 240
8140 N. Mopac Expwy. Austin, TX 78759

Phone: 512-794-9268
Fax: 512-794-8280

E-Mail: office@txcouncil.com
Web: <http://www.txcouncil.com>

SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT

VA Medical Center. Contact the Addictions Treatment Center at the local VA Medical Center. Call **1-877-222-8387** to or go to: www.va.gov/directory to find the medical center nearest you.

If not eligible for veterans' benefits, the following sources may be able to tell you where you can go to get help:

- **The Federal Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administrations Treatment Referral Routing Service** can refer you to local programs. Call 1-800-662-4357.
- **Texas Department of State Health Services:** www.dshs.state.tx.us/sa/findingservices/default.shtm - This site contains a map to find the outreach, screening and referral provider your area. These community-based programs operate 24-hour hot lines and referral services. For the statewide hotline, call **(877) 9-NO DRUG** (877-966-3784). The call is free.
- **Focus On Recovery Helpline** - A 24-hour national alcohol and drug abuse addiction and treatment hotline: 1-800-888-9383.

FINANCIAL HELP

- **Temporary Financial Assistance.** The American Legion provides Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) from its national headquarters to help maintain a stable environment for children of veterans. To obtain an application, look in the phone book to contact a local post, or contact the National Headquarters to find the post nearest you.
- **Food Stamps.** If you are unemployed with little or no income, you may be able to get food stamps. A person may normally qualify for \$85 to \$100 worth of food stamps per month. Call the toll-free information number at 1-800-221-5689, or find a list of food stamp hotlines for each state at www.fns.usda.gov/fns/ You can also contact the local Department of Human Services, many drop-in shelters, or legal aid services to ask for an application.
- **Supplemental Security Income (SSI)** benefits can be applied for before your release, even though you won't receive the benefits until after you are released. Food Stamps can be applied for together with SSI. Normally, it takes about three months to review an application, so apply well before your release date. It is best to get help filling out the application. For detailed information or assistance, call 1-800-772-1213, or your local social security administration office listed in the phone book blue pages, or go to: www.socialsecurity.gov/ssi/index.htm

- **2-1-1**—The phone number 211 will reach an information and referral service in your local area. They have listings of assistance providers such as churches, non-profits, etc. that may be able to provide financial, legal or housing assistance. Simply dial 211.

LEGAL HELP

The Department of Veterans Affairs does not provide legal services for personal reasons.

Veteran status issues:

- You should talk to a **Veterans Service Officer** for help with discharge upgrades, seeking benefits, and filing a VA claim (call 1-800-562-2308 for the nearest Service Officer).

Other legal issues:

- Most law is state-specific. Most common legal problems are governed by the law in the state where you live or where the problem occurred. When looking for legal help, make sure that information you find applies to your state, or that the lawyer or other service provider is qualified to work in your state.
- The **American Bar Association** has a web site with guidelines about free legal services and links to directories of legal aid offices and pro-bono programs. Go to: www.abanet.org
- **Legal Services or Legal Aid offices** have staff lawyers to provide free legal help to poor clients. The lawyers are usually experts in the types of problems that poor clients often have. Look in the yellow pages for a local Legal Aid office or check online for the program, nearest you.
- **Lone Star Legal Aid** has an online list of offices in Texas that provide free legal help to clients who qualify. Go to: www.lonestarlegal.org/
- **Texas Legal Aid Finder** website is provided by Texas Housing. Go to: www.texashousing.org/
- Lawyers in private practice sometimes volunteer in "pro-bono" programs to take cases for poor clients free of charge. Check the yellow pages to contact your **Local Bar Association** to learn if there is a pro-bono program in your community, or go to: www.abanet.org/barserv/stlobar.html.

WOMEN VETERANS

Most VA **Medical Centers** and readjustment offices have a designated Women Veterans Coordinator to assist women veterans in accessing VA benefit programs and healthcare services. Call 1-877-222-8387 or go to: www.va.gov/directory to find the medical center nearest you.

- **The Texas Department of Veterans Affairs** has a designated Women Veterans Coordinator to help women veterans. Call 1-800-562-2308 or go to: www.tvc.state.tx.us/womenveterans.htm
- Many women in prison had similar histories, problems, and personal issues before their arrest and conviction. Mentors with **Women in Community Service** (WICS) help women preparing to leave prison and those who are just getting back into society. WICS' prison programs help women think about their behavior, gain job skills, and build self-esteem. Contact the **U.S. DOL, Job Corps** at 1-800-283- 9427 or go to: www.wics.org to find the nearest WICS program.

CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES

The Office of the Attorney General recognizes that most people need a little time to get on their feet after being released from prison. The Attorney General's Office may be able to temporarily postpone certain enforcement actions if you provide our office with evidence that you are looking for a job and providing some support to your child.

Contact Information:

Website: www.oag.state.tx.us/cs/about/index.shtml

E-mail: child.support@oag.state.tx.us

For more information about child support services, please call the **Office of the Attorney General, Child Support Division** at 1-800-252-8014 or contact the child support office nearest you:

Austin/Travis County	512-514-7000
Dallas/Tarrant County	972-339-3100
El Paso	915-779-2388
Houston/Harris County	713-243-7100
Lubbock	806-765-0094
McAllen	956-682-5581
San Antonio/Bexar County	210-841-8450
Tyler	903-595-6900

GOODWILL SERVICES

Assessment: Matching people's skills, talents, aptitudes and abilities.

Skills Training: Currently there is a skilled labor shortage across America. Goodwill offers an array of skills training opportunities.

Job Readiness Training: Many people have been out of the workforce for a long time and need training to include interviewing, problem solving, time management, work etiquette, interpersonal skills and basic job retention skills.

Job Placement: Goodwill offers an array of placement services including resources for finding employment, interviewing classes, resume preparation and job search support groups. Goodwill is dedicated to matching people with the right skills to the right job.

Job Retention: Goodwill offers long-term follow-up, mentoring, job coaching and counseling services to ensure job retention. Goodwill also focuses upon career advancement, to help the employee and employer both derive the most benefit.

Support Services: Employability is often dependent upon reliable transportation, childcare, affordable housing and a stable home life. In collaboration with other local community organizations, Goodwill offers support services to ensure the success of every person. Counseling, literacy training, ESL classes etc. are a part of the "whatever it takes to be successful" philosophy which is incorporated into the support services network.

For information pertaining to the local Goodwill in your community, see [Texas Corporate Headquarters Locations](#).

For information related to multiple Goodwill locations or the Texas Association of Goodwills, contact:

Lori Henning
Executive Director
Texas Association of Goodwills
12400 Hwy. 71 W.
Ste. 350, PMB #174
Austin, TX 78738
Phone: 512-263-8920

SECTION III

SEEKING FEDERAL BENEFITS

The Department of Veterans Affairs publishes a booklet called "Federal Benefits for Veterans and Their Dependents" that describes the types of benefits available and lists the addresses and phone numbers for VA facilities nationwide. Write the VA Regional Office (VARO) to request a copy.

U.S. DEPT. OF VETERANS AFFAIRS - REGIONAL OFFICES

Houston VARO

6900 Almeda Road
Houston, Texas 77030

Waco VARO

One Veterans Plaza
701 Clay Avenue
Waco, Texas 76799

Call 1-800-827-1000 or find information about benefits at -
www.vba.va.gov/benefits

The TEXAS VETERANS COMMISSION (TVC) serves veterans, their dependents and survivors, in all matters pertaining to veterans' benefits and rights. It is the designated agency of the State of Texas to represent the State and its veterans before the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The TVC represents veterans in filing VA disability claims, during VA appeals processes and assisting dependents with survivor benefits. Veterans County Service Officers are trained by the Veterans Benefits Administration.

Contact a Texas Veterans County Service Officer in your area to assist you.

Veterans' HOTLINE: 1-800-252-VETS (8387) (In-State Only)
Local Benefits Info Line: 512-463-5538
Hotline Hours: 7:30 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Mailing Address:

Texas Veterans Commission
P.O. Box 12277
Austin, Texas 78711-2277
512-463-6564
(FAX) 512-475-2395

Office Location:

Stephen F. Austin Building, Ste. 620
1700 N. Congress
Austin, TX 78701
Email: info@tvc.state.tx.us
Web: www.tvc.state.tx.us

ELIGIBILITY FOR VA BENEFITS DURING INCARCERATION

Veterans incarcerated and incarcerated dependents may apply for the same compensation, dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC) – service connected death benefits – and pension benefits as veterans who are not incarcerated. However, Congress restricts the amount of benefits that may be paid to a veteran or dependent while he or she is incarcerated. These benefits are institutionalized as part of law: *38 U.S.C Sec 5313 (a), 38 C.F.R., Sec. 3.665 (a), (d)*, which reads as follows:

If a veteran is incarcerated as the result of a “felony” conviction as defined by law: “Any offense punishable by death or imprisonment for a term exceeding one year, unless specifically categorized as a misdemeanor under the law of the prosecuting jurisdiction.”

Then, the amount paid to a veteran incarcerated for a service-connected disability is generally limited by law to the 10 percent disability rate, or half the amount of the ten percent rate if the veteran’s disability rating is 10 percent. (If the veteran is rated before incarceration as 20 percent disabled or higher, he will receive only the amount payable to a 10 percent disabled veteran.) Incarcerated DIC recipients will receive one-half the amount paid to a veteran receiving compensation payments for a 10 percent-rated disability.

A veteran may not receive non-service connected VA pension benefits, or any portion of these benefits, while incarcerated for a felony or misdemeanor. However, his family may receive an apportionment of such benefits under the procedure described above. (See 38 C.F.R. Sec.3.666)

One important requirement for eligibility for VA benefits is that the veteran has to have been issued either an honorable or general discharge, or would have received one if not for re-enlisting. If a veteran had two periods of service, one honorable and the other less than honorable, he may still be eligible for VA benefits based on the honorable period of service.

VA Medical Care can not be provided to veterans in prison, but VA health facilities may provide care to you after your release. Contact 1-877-222-8387 to find the medical center or clinic nearest you.

BENEFITS PAYMENTS WHILE INCARCERATED

There is a 60-day "grace period" following a conviction when you may still receive full benefits. To avoid an overpayment, it is important that you notify the VARO immediately when you go to prison if you are receiving payments. If you do not notify the VA and

receive overpayment, you and your family will lose all financial payments until the debt is paid.

For example, Joe is a veteran who receives a VA pension. He commits a crime, is convicted, and is incarcerated, but doesn't tell the VA right away and keeps getting paid for 6 months. After serving his sentence of 18 months, he is released and applies to the VA to have his pension restarted. He will have an overpayment, which must be recovered from the restarted benefits. Until the overpayment is recovered, Joe will have to go without that income.

Your award for compensation or pension benefits should resume from the date you are released, as long as the VA receives notice of release within one year. Form 21-4193, Notice to Department of Veterans Affairs of Veteran or Beneficiary Incarcerated in Penal Institution, available through your counselors should be completed before release, signed by a prison official and submitted to VA Benefits Administration.

APPORTIONMENT

Although legally, the veteran can only receive a portion of the full amount payable for his or her disability rating, the remaining balance may be "apportioned to the individual's dependent family". To apply for apportionment, the veteran must send a letter that identifies the veteran and the apportionment claimant and makes it clear they are requesting an apportionment of his VA benefits to the VA Regional Office (VARO) that has jurisdiction over the veteran's case. VA regulations clearly specify this apportionment amount will only go to family members if they can show financial need for such amount. This applies to the spouse, children, or dependent parents who are involved in the application.

In deciding whether any apportionment is appropriate, the amount of the apportionment, and to whom it will go, the following factors are considered:

- The family member's income and living expenses;
- The amount of compensation available to be apportioned;
- The needs and living expenses of other family members; and
- Special needs of any of the family members.

For example: a veteran incarcerated rated as 80 percent disability can only receive the amount he or she would get if he or she were 10 percent disabled. However, his or her family may be apportioned up to 70 percent, the difference of the 80 percent rating. (DIC may also be apportioned with similar restrictions.)

There is a 60-day "grace period" following conviction where the veteran, or Dependency or Indemnity Compensation (DIC) recipient, may still receive full

benefits. If the veteran continues to receive benefits after the 60-day period, it will result in an "overpayment". The VA considers it to be the recipient's responsibility and fault if this occurs because the recipient failed to notify the VA of his or her incarceration. Attempts to obtain a waiver in these situations of overpayment are often unsuccessful. As a rule, the veteran loses most, if not all, financial benefits until the VA recovers the entire overpayment. It has also been a standard procedure that the family will not be entitled to receive an apportionment until the debt is completely recovered.

For more information concerning VA debt collection rules that may affect the veteran incarcerated, telephone: 1-800-827-1000 and request a Veterans Service Organization representative or, write to a Veterans Service Organization.

One other relevant restriction on veteran's incarcerated eligibility for service connected disability compensation is that: "No total disability rating based on un-employability, may be assigned to an incarcerated veteran".

It is important to remember that most VA decisions, including those on apportionment, can be appealed to the Board of Veterans Appeals and, if need be, to the Court of Appeal for Veterans Affairs.

RE-STARTING BENEFITS AT RELEASE

It is important that each disabled veteran receiving compensation or DIC payments promptly notify the VARO. Regular full benefit payments should begin upon release, providing the VA is notified of the veteran's release, including placement within a community treatment center or halfway house in the community, within one year of release. VARO needs formal notification from the prison of your release in order to re-start benefits: The sooner that document is provided to VARO, the sooner VARO can begin to process your request.

SEEKING HELP AFTER RELEASE

If you would like to get benefits or think you have a pending claim before the VA, it is best to get professional help to assist you. Many Veterans Service Organizations (VSO's) have trained staff who can help you with your VA claim and can legally represent your claim before the VA. Some also help homeless and at-risk veterans find the support services they need. You can contact any VSO listed in the Guidebook to learn of an office near you.

SEEKING BENEFITS ON YOUR OWN

Although we encourage you to seek the aid of a service representative, you may choose to apply for VA benefits on your own. Write your local VA Regional Office or find the forms online at www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms1.htm. You can also apply for certain benefits online at: www.vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/main.asp Below are brief descriptions of forms needed to file for certain VA benefits. Be sure you use a return address where mail will get to you as quickly as possible. Make photocopies of all forms for your records before sending your packet to the VARO nearest you.

- **VA Form 21-526** - Application for Compensation and/or Pension - must be filed to apply for compensation or pension. Mail your DD-214 and the following forms to the VARO nearest your release destination 30 to 45 days before your release.
- **VA Form 21-4138** - Statement in Support of Claim - lets you explain why you deserve the benefits you are asking for because of your disability or disorder. It is best to have a service representative help you complete the form.
- **VA Form 21-4142** - Authorization for Release of Information - If you have received medical or mental health care that may be relevant to your claim from anyone other than a VA medical facility, you need to fill out a VA Form 21-4142, giving permission for release of medical records to the VA.
- **VA Form 10-10EZ** - Application for Health Benefits - is used by the VA to determine if you can receive medical benefits. Complete the form and bring it with you to the VA medical facility where you will seek evaluation for treatment.
- **VA Form 28-1900** - Disabled Veterans Application for Vocational Rehabilitation - is needed to apply for the vocational rehabilitation program to help veterans who were disabled during their service reach maximum independence in daily living, to learn the skills needed to get a job, and to find and keep a job. Send VA Form 28-1900 to the VARO in your area 10 to 15 days before your release.
- **VA Form 70-3288** - Request for and Consent to Release of Information from Claimant's Records - is used to get records relevant to your claim from VA facilities (regional offices, medical centers, outpatient clinics, and vet centers). Request a fee waiver under section 38 C.F.R. Sec.1.526 (h), which requires the VARO to provide a veteran with one set of his or her records free of charge.

CHECKLIST

Using This Guide

- Ask about classes or resources to help you plan for your release.
- Make a list of your needs.
- Make a list of who may be able to help you.
- Write letters and/or contact organizations by phone or email.
- Write down the steps you take so that you do not repeat them.

Just for Veterans

- Know where to call toll-free for help.
- Contact organizations about what services they have to offer.
- Think about your housing needs and gather information about what is available locally.
- Learn about job resources and create a plan to find a job.
- Learn about health issues and what services are available.
- Learn about the resources available for substance abuse and mental health treatment in your area.
- Learn about your options to get financial help.
- Begin to take care of other legal issues.
- Learn about homeless veterans services.
- Learn about resources for women veterans.
- If you are not currently receiving benefits, find out if you can or should be.
- If you are receiving benefits, notify the VA when you go to prison to avoid an overpayment.
- Contact a veteran service representative to represent you and help you file a claim.
- Apply for apportionment so that some of the money withheld may be given to eligible family members.

RESOURCE WEB SITES

U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) - www.va.gov

Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) - www.vfw.org

Disabled American Veterans (DAV) - www.dav.org

Vietnam Veterans of America - www.vva.org

American Legion - www.legion.org

AMVETS - www.amvets.org

Social Security Administration - www.ssa.gov

National Coalition for Homeless Veterans - www.nchv.org/index.cfm