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Fact Sheet

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Veterans Justice Programs Services for Veterans Involved in the Criminal Justice System

Incarceration as an adult male is the most powerful predictor of homelessness¹. VA services for justice-involved Veterans are therefore provided through two dedicated national programs, both prevention-oriented components of VA's Homeless Programs: Health Care for Reentry Veterans (HCRV) and Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO). Known collectively as the Veterans Justice Programs (VJP), HCRV and VJO facilitate access to needed VA health care and other services for Veterans at all stages of the criminal justice process, from initial contact with law enforcement through community reentry following extended incarceration. Figure 1, below, maps VJP operations onto the criminal justice system using the Sequential Intercept Model,² a widely-used tool for planning the integration of treatment resources into criminal justice proceedings.

Health Care for Reentry Veterans

HCRV Specialists provide outreach to Veterans approaching release from state and Federal prisons. They briefly assess reentry Veterans' probable treatment needs, help Veterans plan to access responsive services upon release, and provide post-release follow-up as needed to ensure that Veterans are engaged with needed services. Most HCRV Specialists are based at VA medical centers (VAMC), but they typically serve Veterans across a large area, often conducting outreach to prison facilities in at least one entire state, and sometimes an entire Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN).

Veterans Justice Outreach

VJO Specialists serve Veterans at earlier stages of the criminal justice process, with a three-pronged focus on outreach to community law enforcement, jails, and courts. VJO Specialists at each VAMC work with Veterans in the local criminal courts (including but not limited to the Veterans Treatment Courts, or VTCs), conduct outreach in local jails, and engage with local law enforcement by delivering VA-focused training sessions and other informational presentations. Each VA medical center has at least one VJO Specialist, who serves as a liaison between VA and the local criminal justice system.

VJP: Facilitating Veterans' Access to VA Health Care

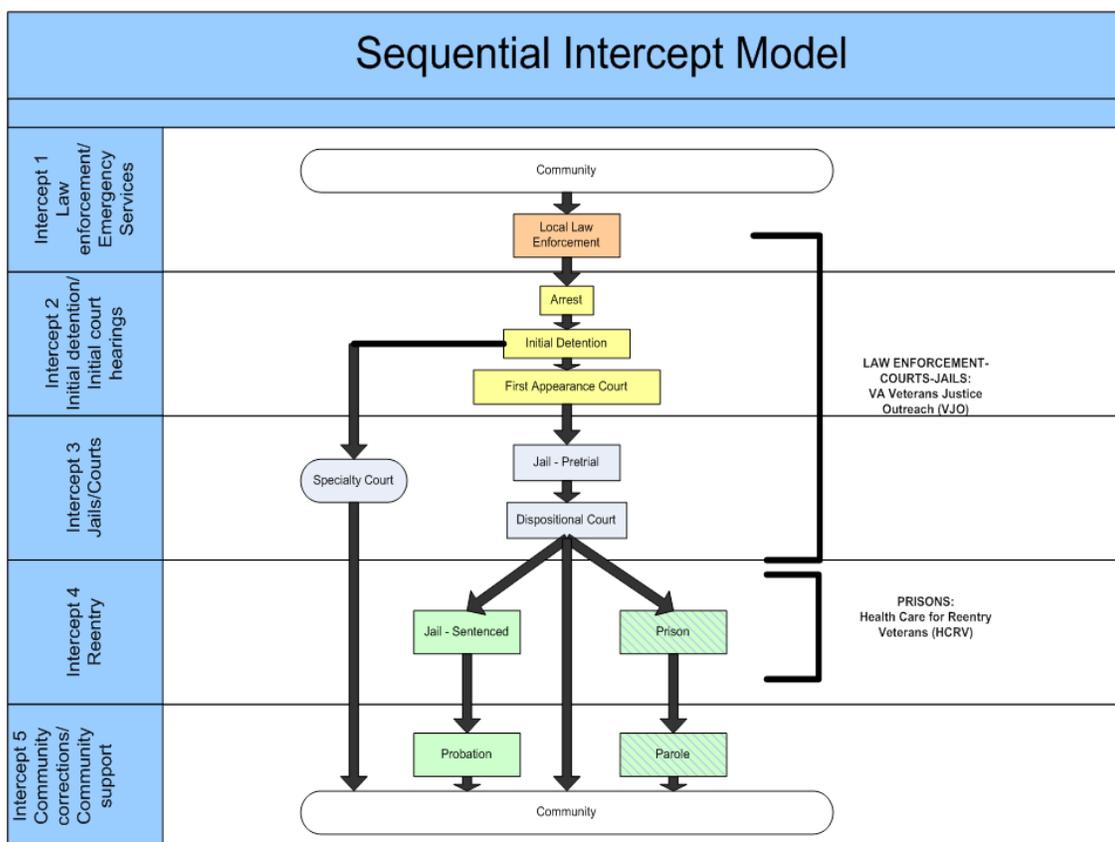
¹ Burt, M., Aron, L.Y., Lee, E. (2001). *Helping America's Homeless: Emergency shelter or affordable housing?* Urban Institute Press, Washington, DC.

² Munetz, M.R. and Griffin, P.A. (2006). *Use of the Sequential Intercept Model as an Approach to Decriminalization of People with Serious Mental Illness.* *Psychiatric Services*, 57, 544-549.

Veterans who are seen by HCRV and VJO Specialists access VA mental health and substance use treatment at high rates. Most Veterans seen in the VJO program have a mental health (77 percent) or substance use disorder (71 percent) diagnosis, or both (58 percent). Within one year of their VJO outreach visit, 97 percent of Veterans with mental health diagnoses had had at least one VHA mental health visit, and 78 percent had at least six visits. Within the same timeframe, 72 percent of Veterans with substance use disorder diagnoses had had at least one VHA substance use disorder visit, and 54 percent had had at least six. Veterans seen by HCRV Specialists have a similar profile, with 56 percent with a mental health diagnosis, 55 percent with a substance abuse diagnosis and 39 percent with both. Veterans in HCRV access VA care at high rates, but slightly lower than those in VJO with 93 percent of those with a mental health diagnosis having at least one visit, and 64 percent having at least six visits. For substance abuse, 57 percent had at least one visit, and 37 percent had at least six.

Unlike other community-facing VA outreach programs, the VJP's core functions are performed in controlled environments to which VA has no right of access. The work of VJP is therefore uniquely dependent on the ability of its field staff to build and maintain relationships with partners in their communities' criminal justice systems. Differences among local criminal justice systems, as well as the partnership-driven nature of the work, mean that VJP operations can look significantly different from one location to the next.

Figure 1 – VJP Operations by Criminal Justice Setting



Contact information for each HCRV Specialist is available at: <http://www.va.gov/homeless/reentry.asp>.

Contact information for each VJO Specialist is available at: <http://www.va.gov/homeless/vjo.asp>.

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