

# VHA Homeless Programs Office

Working Together to Help Veterans Exit Homelessness

JUNE 2020

## Program highlights



*VA's Homeless Programs Office supports VTCs through the participation of its Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists.*

### **To continue serving Veterans during the COVID-19 pandemic, Veterans Treatment Courts (VTCs) across the country have moved to services online.**

To continue serving Veterans during the COVID-19 pandemic, Veterans Treatment Courts (VTCs) across the country have moved to services online.

VA's [Homeless Programs Office](#) supports VTCs through the participation of its Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists. These VJO specialists assess Veteran defendants' treatment needs and link them with the appropriate VA treatment services. They also provide regular updates to the court on the Veteran's progress throughout their treatment.

To make it happen, VTCs and VJO specialists throughout the country set up daily remote options to schedule court appearances. On any given call, there can be 25 to 30 people. This includes the Veteran, the Judge, the prosecutor, the case coordinator, and others.

"When the pandemic hit, we were able to close the court down almost immediately and move to phone and online communications," said Jessica Mann, [VJO Program](#) Specialist at the Salt Lake County Third District VTC.

"In the first two weeks of not meeting in court, we coordinated daily contact with Veterans in our program. They could call us, or we could call them for a daily check-in until we figured out how to further serve them."

Veteran mentors now fill that role. They provide nonclinical support to the Veteran participants on behalf of the VTC. Over the past month, Veteran Al Palmer, a mentor at the Salt Lake County Third District VTC, has delivered food and made face masks for Veteran participants and their families.

"I've been checking in with Veteran participants every week or delegating other mentors to do so," said Palmer. "I've always liked the feeling of helping people. And now, as a mentor, I get that feeling again."

Mann said VTCs across the country wouldn't have survived without the mentors. She said she recognizes the remarkable resiliency of Veterans in the current situation.

"During this time, I've been so amazed and impressed with all of the ways our Veteran participants have come together to support one another," she said.

### **About Veterans Treatment Courts**

VTCs offer a second chance for Veterans involved with the criminal justice system by addressing their underlying clinical needs. As a result of the shift in the way that justice-involved Veterans are managed, recidivism rates among this group are lower. Also, many have successfully reintegrated back into their communities.

As of December 2019, VJO Specialists reported serving in 561 VTCs and other Veteran-focused court programs across the U.S.

### **More Information**

- If you or someone you know is a justice-involved Veteran, email the [VJO Specialist nearest you](#) for assistance accessing VA health care services.
- Visit the [Justice for Vets](#) website to learn more about Veterans Treatment Courts.
- Check out VA's new [resource page](#) for information on COVID-19, its impact on people experiencing homelessness, and resources that can help.



*America's Adopt A Soldier has already provided VA with hundreds of smartphones and laptops, procured through public and corporate donations from Verizon and AT&T.*

## Program updates

### **America's Adopt A Soldier donates laptops, mobile phones to keep Veterans connected**

Veterans at risk of or experiencing homelessness can now stay connected with their health care providers, case managers, and loved ones thanks to a nonprofit organization's collaboration with VA.

[America's Adopt A Soldier](#) has worked with VA since 2010 on a multitude of services and support for homeless and at-risk Veterans. The non-profit's newest program keeps Veterans connected with VA care providers via a laptop and mobile phone donation program.

Some Veterans often lack the resources needed to stay connected with VA services and family members. And the need for telecommunication donations to promote connectivity became evident as many states across the country enacted stay-at-home orders due to the pandemic. To learn more, read the full article.

### **John Kuhn, National Director of VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families program, on Borne the Battle Podcast**

Tune into the latest episode of Borne the Battle — VA's weekly podcast — to hear an interview of John Kuhn, National Director of VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families program.

During the interview, Kuhn explains how VA is using the \$300 million allocated this fiscal year through the CARES Act to address the challenges faced by homeless and at-risk Veterans during the COVID-19 pandemic. [Listen and share the episode widely.](#)

## More information

### **2020 Census workers to count population experiencing homelessness in September**

The U.S. Census Bureau follows special processes to count people who lack conventional housing arrangements.

On June 12, the nation's premier statistical agency announced the schedule for counting people experiencing homelessness during the 2020 Decennial Census.

The three steps below follow months of outreach and coordination with local census offices, partners, shelter directors, service providers, and others:

- Step 1: Counting people who are in shelters.
- Step 2: Counting people at soup kitchens and mobile food vans.
- Step 3: Counting people in non-sheltered, outdoor locations, such as tent encampments and on the streets.

The results of these efforts, across the country, are critical. Census data about those experiencing homelessness, including Veterans, helps ensure that government agencies target resources where they are needed most. VA will use 2020 Census results with data from many other internal and external sources to address current and forecast future needs of Veterans.

Read the full plan on how those experiencing homelessness, including Veterans, will be counted in the 2020 Census [here](#).

## Communicate with us

We value your feedback about the work underway to prevent and end homelessness among Veterans. Please share your comments by clicking the blue "Contact Homeless Outreach" button on the [VHA Homeless Programs website](#).