

VAU.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs**Fact Sheet**Office of Public Affairs
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www.va.gov

January 2021

Veterans Treatment Courts and other Veteran-focused courts served by VA Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) Program is a prevention-focused component of VA's Homeless Programs Office (HPO), whose mission is to end homelessness among Veterans. Since the program was founded in 2009, VJO Specialists at every VA medical center have provided outreach to justice-involved Veterans in various settings, including jails and courts. As of November 2020, VJO Specialists report serving in 601 Veterans Treatment Courts (VTCs) and other Veteran-focused court programs across the U.S. The number of these courts has grown significantly since June 2016, when VJO Specialists reported serving in 461 courts.

What is a Veterans Treatment Court?

The VTC model is based on the drug and mental health courts that have existed for nearly 30 years. Unlike traditional criminal courts, the primary purpose of a VTC is not to determine whether a defendant is guilty of an offense, but rather to ensure that he or she receives treatment to address unmet clinical needs. Several factors distinguish VTCs from drug and mental health courts, most notably their focus on Veteran defendants, and the involvement of volunteer Veteran mentors who provide non-clinical support to Veteran participants. VTCs reflect the communities that choose to start them, and there is considerable variation among the courts in both participant eligibility criteria and operational processes.

What is VA's role in these courts?

VTCs are initiated, funded, and operated by local governments, rather than by VA. However, VA directly supports VTCs through the participation of its VJO Specialists as members of VTC treatment teams, and through the health care services it provides to Veteran defendants, most of whom would otherwise receive care at county expense. The Specialists assess Veteran defendants' treatment needs, link Veterans with appropriate VA treatment services, and (with the Veterans' permission) provide regular updates to the court on their progress in treatment. VA's role in a VTC is limited to the treatment-related aspects of the court process; VA does not decide which Veteran defendants should be admitted to a VTC or define the level of offenses (e.g., misdemeanor vs. felony) that a VTC will accept. VJO Specialists work closely with justice system partners as they plan new VTCs, informing the partners about VA services that would be available to Veterans defendants locally or regionally. However, as with all VJO-related services, the Specialists do not advocate specifically for the use a particular model or set numerical targets for desired VTC growth. Instead, they help communities plan to meet the needs of justice-involved Veterans using approaches that best fit local circumstances.

For more information, contact:Katie Stewart, National Coordinator, VJO; Katharine.Stewart@va.gov, (202) 461-5863Contact information for each VJO Specialist is available at: <http://www.va.gov/homeless/vjo.asp>