Logic Model of the Department of Veterans Affairs’ Role in Veterans Treatment Courts

Andrea K. Finlay, PhD, Sean Clark, JD, Jessica Blue-Howells, LCSW, Sherri Claudio, LCSW, Matt Stimmel, PhD, Jack Tsai, PhD, Alec Buchanan, PhD, MD, Joel Rosenthal, PhD, Alex H.S. Harris, PhD & Susan Frayne, MD, MPH

FUNDING: This work was funded in part by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Health Services Research and Development (HSR&D) supplemental award to Dr. Finlay (CIN 14-238; PI: Dr. Steven Asch). Dr. Finlay was supported by a VA HSR&D Career Development Award (CDA 13-279). Dr. Harris was funded as a VA HSR&D Research Career Scientist (RCS 14-232). The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position nor policy of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) or the U.S. government. The VA had no role in the study design; in the collection, analysis and interpretation of data; in the writing of the report; or in the decision to submit the paper for publication.

What do we know?

Since the establishment of Veterans Treatment Courts (VTCs) in the early 2000s, these courts have grown exponentially with over 550 Veteran-related courts, dockets, and tracks now operating in the U.S.1. Partnership with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides for linkage to health care treatment and psychosocial support; however, VTCs operate independently from the VA. There is limited research supporting the effectiveness of VTCs. While evaluation efforts are in process, VTCs may benefit from logic models to guide their programs. Logic models are aimed at connecting practices, products and outcomes with the theoretical assumptions underlying a program3.

The purpose of this research brief is to propose and discuss a VA facing logic model for VTCs designed to serve as a practical tool for VA practitioners to use for program planning and implementation, to aid in communication with other VTC partners and Veterans about the VA’s role in VTCs, and to guide evaluation and research efforts examining the impact of VA resources on VA care and health outcomes of VTC participants.

New information provided by the study

Drawing from an extant VTC logic model4, the literature on VTCs, and the broader specialty court literature, a preliminary VA-VTC logic model with outcomes was developed. A series of expert panels with Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) specialists, researchers, clinical staff, and operational leaders was organized to seek expert input on the logic model.

The VA-VTC logic model (Figure 1) posits that the VA’s role in VTCs is limited to the resources and activities that are directly related to VA services, and the outcomes and population impacts are aligned with the health and health care aspects of VTCs. The most visible VA resource in the courtroom are the VJO specialists; however, VTCs also draw heavily upon VA facility treatment providers and peer support specialists to meet the treatment and psychosocial needs of Veterans in VTCs. Multiple activities occur as part of the VA’s role in VTCs, most notably the VJO specialist serves as a liaison between the court
and the VA and the VA provides treatment services. Outputs may include number of outpatient visits, number of days in stable housing, proportion of Veterans who address their medical condition, and/or changes in VA benefits. Long-term positive outcomes include continuing connection to and use of VA services, and obtaining permanent housing and employment. Population impacts include improved access to treatment services and an expected decrease in prevalence of preventable or reversible medical, mental health and substance use disorder conditions observed among justice-involved Veterans.

Figure 1. Logic Model of VA’s Role in Veterans Treatment Court

The VA-VTC logic model is a novel contribution to current thinking about VTCs that explicitly recognizes the VA as a separate agency partnering in these courts. The VA-VTC logic model can be used in a variety of ways including:

- Planning new courts and highlighting resources available in the VA.
- Improving program implementation in existing VTCs.
- Facilitating communication among stakeholders in new and existing courts.
- Guiding evaluation and research efforts focused on VTCs.

This logic model can function as a starting point for conversations about the resources that can be provided and the monitoring that can occur by VA staff to ensure the VA is implementing their services in VTCs as intended by the VA.

References


