

Office of Health Equity

Veterans Health Administration

Department of Veterans Affairs



OPIOID USE DISORDER AMONG JUSTICE-INVOLVED VETERANS FACT SHEET

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INTRODUCTION

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) serves a Veteran population that is increasingly racially and ethnically diverse. Equitable access to high-quality care for all Veterans is a major tenet of the VA healthcare mission. The Office of Health Equity (OHE) champions the elimination of health disparities and achieving health equity for all Veterans, including Veterans connected to the criminal justice system.

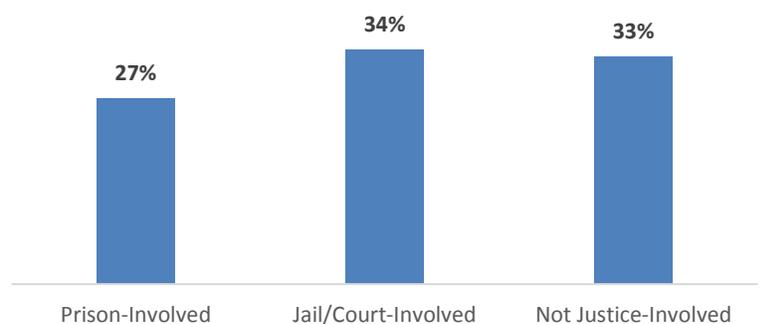
HEALTH DISPARITIES

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) leads the nation in addiction treatment. VHA provides treatment for substance use disorders in 220 outpatient and residential specialty programs. The most effective treatment for opioid use disorder (OUD) is pharmacotherapy. Medications for opioid use disorder include methadone, buprenorphine, and/or naltrexone. Access to treatment is crucial in reducing the risk of relapsing and the risk of recidivism for justice-involved adults. Therefore, it is vital for Veterans leaving the criminal justice system and transitioning to VHA care to be connected to pharmacotherapy.

About 11% of Veterans diagnosed with opioid use disorder (OUD) at VHA facilities were involved in the criminal justice system.

There are disparities accessing OUD treatment for Veterans recently involved with the justice system. About a quarter (27%) of Veterans with OUD who had served time in prison accessed pharmacotherapy. However, about one-third (34%) Veterans with OUD who were involved with jail/court (where Veterans with minor offenses usually interact with the criminal justice system or could be on trial or in a specialty court for felony charges), accessed pharmacotherapy. Among these justice-involved Veterans, female and African American Veterans, and Veterans who live in rural areas, are homeless, or are 50% or more service-connected disability rating, and have a co-occurring mental health disorder had lower odds of receiving these important medications.

Percentage of Veterans Receiving Pharmacotherapy For Opioid Use Disorder



REDUCING DISPARITIES AND IMPROVING ACCESS

The Office of Health Equity supports national and local efforts by VA to reduce health disparities among the justice-involved Veteran population by supporting the Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) and Health Care for Reentry Veterans (HCRV) programs. Both programs assist in facilitating access to VA health care and other services for justice-involved Veterans from initial contact with the criminal justice process to community reentry after release.



Veteran Justice Outreach (VJO)

The VJO program assists Veterans with mental health or substance use disorders when they have contact with the earlier phases of the criminal justice system. Each VA Medical Center has a VJO specialist who works with local criminal courts, such as Veteran Treatment Courts, conducts outreach in local jails, and engages with local law enforcement. VJO Specialists are critical because they assess each Veteran's treatment needs, link them to necessary VA treatment services, and serve as liaisons between VA and the local criminal justice system. To find out more information about the VJO Program, go to

<https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/VJO.asp>.

Health Care for Reentry Veterans (HCRV)

The HCRV program plays a vital role in providing outreach to Veterans leaving state and federal prisons. State specialists that are based in local VA Medical Centers engage in outreach to Veterans in prisons and assess the treatment needs Veterans will have when leaving the criminal justice system. They then help Veterans get connected to VA health care and other services they need to avoid recidivism and to live healthy lives. To find out more information about the HCRV program, go to

<https://www.va.gov/homeless/reentry.asp>.

For more information about the Office of Health Equity visit: <https://www.va.gov/healthequity/>

Reference

Finlay, A., Harris, A., Rosenthal, J., Blue-Howells, J., Clark, S., Mcguire, J., ... Binswanger, I. (2016). Receipt of pharmacotherapy for opioid use disorder by justice-involved U.S. Veterans Health Administration patients. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 160, 222–226.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2016.01.013>