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VA ingenuity affords formerly incarcerated Veterans valuable resources for rehabilitation

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs introduces new efforts to improve interagency coordination and expand outreach to criminal justice partners, to better help those reentering into society after incarceration.

In conjunction with a [presidential proclamation designating April as Second Chance Month](#), the initiative is part of the Biden-Harris administration's goal to provide meaningful redemption and rehabilitation for formerly imprisoned persons.

"Justice-involved Veterans deserve an opportunity to fully reintegrate into society," said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. "During Second Chance Month, VA is taking action to enable Veterans committed to rejoining society, post-incarceration, by expanding the use of a web-based tool to identify and connect them to needed VA care, while also restoring VA benefits faster."

In partnership with the Social Security Administration and Bureau of Prisons, the Veterans Benefits Administration is working diligently to streamline information-sharing processes among these three agencies to ensure VBA receives prison release dates for Veterans within 30 days after release to improve timeliness to reinstate benefits as applicable.

Currently, Veterans bear the administrative burden of restoring benefits post-incarceration. Once released, a Veteran notifies VA, the department then must obtain verification of prison release dates from corrections facilities. This multi-step process causes a delay in the restoration of a wide range of health, rehabilitation and subsistence benefits for Veterans. It also hinders their successful and full reintegration into our communities. Through collaborative information-sharing, VBA will ensure the load is on the agency, not the Veteran.

Assistance available to impacted Veterans includes:

- Expansion of VA's existing outreach campaign to state prison systems and jails to increase the number of Veterans to whom it can offer individualized reentry services and connect more Veterans to post-release services while they are still incarcerated.
- Assistance through VA's [Veterans Reentry Search Service](#), a free web-based tool criminal justice partners and prison and jail staff can use to identify incarcerated Veterans and connect them to needed services post release.
- Help through [Health Care for Reentry Veterans](#) and [Veterans Justice Outreach](#) which make up Veterans Justice Programs. Its mission is to identify justice-involved Veterans and engage them through outreach to facilitate access to VA services at the earliest possible point.
- Outreach by Veterans Justice Programs specialists for the purpose of linking Veterans to needed Veterans Health Administration services and other community resources.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports there are approximately 107,400 Veterans in state or federal prison. Following release, these Veterans are at increased risk of homelessness, suicide and death by drug overdose — that's why it's vital to re-connect Veterans to VA care and benefits to which they may be entitled, post-incarceration.

More information on Second Chance Month and its offerings can be found at the [National Reentry Resource Center](#).

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