

Office of Health Equity Veterans Health Administration Department of Veterans Affairs



POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER AND CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM-INVOLVED VETERANS INFORMATION BRIEF

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INTRODUCTION

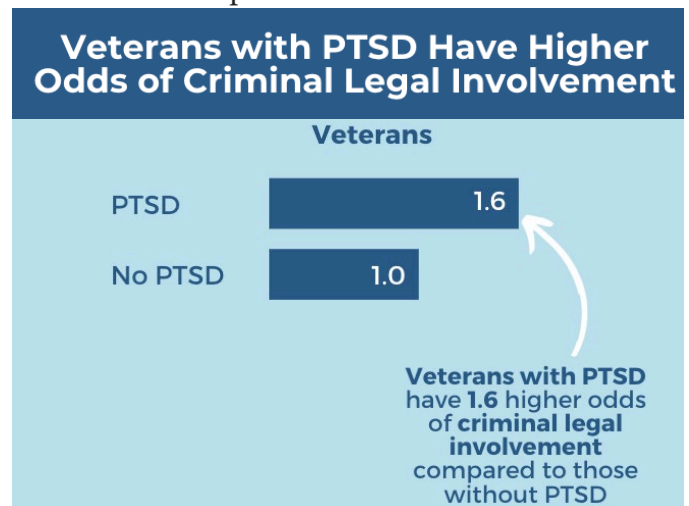
The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) serves a Veteran population that is increasingly diverse. Equitable access to high-quality care for all Veterans is a major tenet of the VA healthcare mission. The Office of Health Equity (OHE) champions the elimination of health disparities and achieving health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

HEALTH DISPARITIES

Veterans who have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms and military sexual trauma are more likely to report legal problems compared to those who do not. Also, compared to the general population of CLS-involved individuals, CLS-involved Veterans have higher rates of PTSD and trauma exposure. Incarcerated male Veterans in jails and prisons in the United States were twice as likely to have been diagnosed with PTSD compared to civilian incarcerated males.

VA researchers sought to better understand the relationship between PTSD and CLS by reviewing existing studies. They found that Veterans who have PTSD may be more likely to have CLS

involvement. Veterans with PTSD symptoms are 1.6 times more likely to have involvement in the CLS than Veterans without PTSD. In other words, Veterans with PTSD are roughly 60% more likely to have had an experience with the CLS.



From: Taylor EN, et al., Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Justice Involvement Among Military Veterans: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis.

Additionally, individuals in criminal legal settings may experience traumatic events during their incarceration. The early identification of PTSD symptoms and prioritization of trauma-informed care in healthcare settings and criminal legal settings could interrupt an existing relationship between the two. In cases where Veterans have already entered the CLS, Veteran-specific units, Veterans Treatment Courts and personalized healthcare services can all be beneficial.



REDUCING DISPARITIES AND IMPROVING ACCESS

The Office of Health Equity supports national and local efforts by VA to reduce health disparities among the CLS-involved Veteran population by supporting the Veterans Justice Programs Office's (VJP) Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) and Health Care for Reentry Veterans (HCRV) programs.

These programs play an important role in facilitating access to VA health care and other services for CLS-involved Veterans at the earliest possible point in the criminal legal system.

VAMCS SUPPORTING REENTRY

Across the country, Veterans Affairs Medical Centers (VAMCs) have partnered with local jails and correctional facilities to develop support to Veterans who are reentering the community. Importantly, these programs frequently begin before legal system involvement, or while Veterans are still incarcerated.

In 2022, the Community Oriented Policing Services Office in the U.S. Department of Justice awarded the Cincinnati Police Department (CPD) Military Liaison Group and the Cincinnati VAMC were the recipients of the 2021 L. Anthony Sutin Award for Innovative Law Enforcement and Community Partnerships. The partnership began when a CPD officer and military Veteran noticed an increase in calls involving Veterans struggling with PTSD. Since then, it has allowed faster identification of Veterans who encounter the Cincinnati Police and quicker connections to VA services. It has also

expanded the support network for CLS-involved Veterans in Cincinnati.

To provide support and structure to Veterans in jails and prisons, some have created Veterans pods/units. Facilities with these units note that they promote military values, foster a sense of community, and make providing services and resources more efficient. VAMCs' and VJO Specialists' involvement is crucial in identifying and providing medical and mental healthcare, substance abuse counseling/treatment, housing and vocational rehabilitation services.



HEALTH CARE FOR REENTRY VETERANS (HCRV)

For Veterans leaving State and Federal prisons, the HCRV program plays a vital role in providing outreach. HCRV specialists work in each Veterans Integrated Service Network and provide referrals and linkages to medical, mental health, and social services to eligible Veterans prior to their re-entry. If needed, HCRV is also able to provide short-term case management for Veterans upon release. 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/>

References

Taylor EN, Timko C, Nash A, Owens MD, Harris AHS, Finlay AK. Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Justice Involvement Among Military Veterans: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *J Trauma Stress*. 2020 Oct;33(5):804-812