

Veterans Reentry: Policies and Practices

REENTRY SYMPOSIUM

AURORA, CO

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In Service to America®



Department of
Veterans Affairs

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OBJECTIVES

- Understand the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA);
- Describe service-related mental health issues such as PTSD, TBI, and other issues, and their impact on veterans and their transition from correctional institutions;
- Highlight specific ways in which reentry policies and practices can effectively support veterans in their transition back to the community; and
- Provide a list of resources available to veterans;

WHAT IS VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA (VVA)?

VVA'S FOUNDING PRINCIPLE

"Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another."

Founded in 1978, Vietnam Veterans of America is the only national Vietnam veterans organization congressionally chartered and exclusively dedicated to Vietnam-era veterans and their families.

GOALS

VVA's goals are to promote and support the full range of issues important to Vietnam veterans, to create a new identity for this generation of veterans, and to change public perception of Vietnam veterans.

ORGANIZATION

- Over 75,000 individual members
- 48 state councils
- 650 local chapters

VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA (VVA)

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

- Aggressively advocate on issues important to veterans
- Seek full access to quality health care for veterans
- Identify the full range of disabling injuries and illnesses incurred during military service
- Hold government agencies accountable for following laws mandating veterans health care
- Create a positive public perception of Vietnam veterans
- Seek the fullest possible accounting of America's POW/MIAs
- Support the next generation of America's war veterans

WHAT IS THE US DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)?

United States Department of Veterans Affairs

➤ *Second largest federal department*

Veterans Health Administration

- 150 hospitals, 820 outpatient clinics, 300 Vet Centers

Veterans Benefits Administration

- 57 Regional Offices
 - Life Insurance, Home Loan, Disability Compensation, Pension, Education, Vocational Rehabilitation

National Cemetery Administration

- 131 National Cemeteries

WHAT ISN'T THE VA

State Departments of Veterans Affairs

- State Veterans Homes
- Benefits: education, loans, tax exemptions, licenses
- Outreach and Advocacy

County Departments of Veterans Affairs

- Benefits counseling, claims preparation, submission, follow-up
- Outreach, information and referral, Advocacy

Veterans Service Organizations (i.e. American Legion, Disabled American Veterans)

- Independent community organizations
- 54 recognized by VA for Claim Representation

U.S. Military Medical Services (i.e. Walter Reed Army Medical Center)

Non Profit Agencies receiving VA funding (Grant and Per Diem, SSVF)

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Combat veterans do not typically have criminal histories prior to their military service. Because of exposure to extreme trauma, many face challenges acclimating back into society, and at times find themselves involved with the criminal justice system.



THE PROBLEM

- 1 in 5 veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from PTSD, TBI, or major depression **and** 1 in 6 are alcohol- and/or drug-addicted;
- Since 2006, the number of veterans receiving mental health care from the VA increased 34%;
- 76% of homeless veterans suffer from a substance abuse or mental health disorder;
- Traditional community treatments do not meet the needs of veterans;
- Some veterans are ending up in the criminal justice system as a result of their service.

INVISIBLE WOUNDS OF WAR

- Combat Fatigue, Soldier's Heart:
- PTSD by Any Other Name...Can Still Wreck Lives
- TBI: Signature Wound of the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq
- The Epidemic of Suicide



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POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

- *“Symptoms of PTSD can be terrifying and usually start soon after the traumatic event, although they might not surface for weeks, months, or even years. If left untreated, PTSD can affect individuals to the point that, over time, even their daily functions become seriously impaired.”*



- Thomas Berger, Ph.D.



TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

- *“Despite the prevalence of TBI among veterans who deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq, veterans of earlier wars may have undiagnosed residuals of TBI, having been injured during training or combat, involved in motor vehicle accidents during military service, and involved in accidents or falls while on active duty.”*

- Thomas Berger, Ph.D.



THE EPIDEMIC OF SUICIDE

“The number of reported suicides committed by veterans and members of the military has risen to the highest level since record-keeping began three decades ago. Statistics, of course, do not paint a full picture... we do know that almost 7 out of 10 veterans who have committed suicide were over the age of 50.”

- Thomas Berger, Ph.D.



How do service related issues impact reentry?

- Mental Health/Substance Abuse/Physical Issues
- Housing
- Employment
- Education (GI Bill Benefits)
- Build a resource directory available in the local area
- Make the connection on the outside for the veteran
- Support INSIDE and OUTSIDE the Walls

Health Care for Re-entry Veterans (HCRV) Program

- Outreach and pre-release assessments services for Veterans in prison
- Referrals and linkages to medical, psychiatric, and social services, including employment services upon release
- Short term case management assistance upon release

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

Why is VA working with Justice Involved Veterans?

- Secretary's commitment
 - "If we are to end Veterans homelessness, we must disrupt the cycles that have come to dominate the lives of justice involved Veterans."
 - "I ... seek your support in a cooperative effort to ensure we never leave behind justice involved Veterans who have the potential to change their futures."
- Homelessness Prevention
 - One of VA's Top 3 priorities – ending Veteran homelessness
 - Risk of being homeless is 3½ greater for males with a history of incarceration
 - CHALENG indicates legal needs are among the most UNMET for homeless Veterans
- Recidivism: two-thirds rearrested in 3 years; three-quarters re-arrested in 5 years

VIDEO OUTREACH

- “A Second Chance for Veterans” – for VA leadership/staff and community partners (includes an introduction by Secretary Shinseki)
- “Suits: Support for Incarcerated Veterans” – direct outreach to incarcerated Veterans (includes a companion training video for correctional staff)
- Each is available online (<http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/VJO.asp>)
- National dissemination:
 - Veterans Justice Outreach and Health Care for Reentry Veterans Specialists use copies of “Second Chance” in presentations to VA and community audiences
 - Justice Programs staff are working with the Association of State Correctional Administrators and other partners to get “Suits” aired in correctional facilities nationwide

Veterans Reentry Search Service (VRSS)

- **The Challenge for all of us: Identifying all justice-involved Veterans**
 - The gap: self-report of military service (2-4%) vs. Bureau of Justice Statistics (9-10%)
- **Why important?**
 - 80% of Veterans in the Justice system are likely eligible for comprehensive high quality VHA healthcare
- **The solution: Veterans Reentry Search Service (VRSS)**
 - VA has daily updated copy of Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS); >30 million Servicemembers
 - VRSS identification rates average 8-9%

VETERANS DORMS

- Units in prisons or jails designed to house Veterans together to deliver services effectively, prepare for reentry, and reconnect with pride from military service
 - Services delivered by multiple partners, including direct prison services, state and county Veterans Affairs, non-profit behavioral health providers, state and local employment services, Vet Centers, outreach provided by VHA
- At most recent inventory (year end 2013), Veterans dorms were active in:
 - Federal prison: West Virginia
 - State prison: Colorado, Florida, Indiana, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia
 - In development Maryland, Ohio, Texas
 - Local jail: Arizona, California, Georgia

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs <http://www.va.gov/>
- Vietnam Veterans of America <http://www.vva.org/>
- Veterans Crisis Line <http://veteranscrisisline.net/>
- National Center for PTSD: <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/>
- White House: Veterans & Military Families
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/veterans>
- SAMSHA: Military Families
<http://www.samhsa.gov/militaryFamilies/>
- VA Polytrauma Program
<http://www.polytrauma.va.gov/>
- Brain Injury Association of America
<http://www.biausa.org/>
- Health Care for Reentry Veterans Program
<http://www.va.gov/homeless/reentry.asp>

QUESTIONS?

LEAVE NO VETERAN BEHIND

