



NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS

*Critical Concerns in Iraq/Afghanistan War Veteran-Forensic Interface:
Veterans Treatment Court as Diversion in Rural Communities*

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Quick Takeaways:

- Veterans Treatment Courts (VTCs), through the use of a collaborative justice and treatment-based model, represent an alternative to the conventional justice system and the negative outcomes associated with imprisonment.
- Forensic psychologists (FPs) can serve as a critical component of VTCs by diagnosing mental illness and recommending treatment before the court, and participation by FPs in the VTC process can be increased through outreach.
- Rural veterans' lack of access to VTCs and to FPs can be improved through telepresence.

Findings:

VTCs are separate court systems for veterans which, using a collaborative justice model, are intended to divert veterans from incarceration and toward treatment. They work with the Veteran Justice Outreach (VJO) program, to avoid incarceration of veterans due to untreated mental illness by providing outreach, service, and treatment to veterans, especially homeless veterans.

Case eligibility can vary, depending on the VTC. Some only accept misdemeanors, some only accept nonviolent crimes, some only accept combat veterans, and some will only accept crimes connected to military service. All VTCs will only accept veterans with mental illness. VTCs often partner with VA and local service organizations, and use mandated treatment in lieu of imprisonment. Treatment is typically covered by the VA and represents a more cost-effective solution than imprisonment. VTCs often rely on veteran mentors as part of treatment. VTCs are associated with lower recidivism rates than conventional incarceration.

FPs are trained in diagnosing mental illness and recommending treatment options. However, they are underutilized, only 5% of VJO Specialists are FPs. Increasing the number of FPs through outreach could improve diagnosis and treatment.

Lack of access to VA resources for rural veterans often means limited access to VTCs and FPs. Incorporating telepresence technology, such as conducting FP meetings and VTC hearings over the internet, can mitigate this lack of access.

Conclusion:

VTCs represent an alternative to incarceration for justice-involved veterans, but the VTC process could be improved by including more FPs. Lack of access to VTCs for rural veterans can be mitigated through the use of telepresence.

NCHV strongly recommends that VTCs connect to local homeless service agencies for cases involving homeless veterans, especially in rural areas with limited treatment options. They will be able to work with VTCs on treatment plans and jail diversion alternatives.

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