Veteran Treatment Courts (VTCs)

**Background**

- After observing an increase in the number of veterans on his Drug Court and Mental Health dockets, the Honorable Robert Russell founded the first VTC in Buffalo, NY in January 2008. Key Components are the foundation of VTCs.²

- Although the core characteristics³ of VTCs vary, they all serve veterans who have been clinically diagnosed with substance abuse and/or mental health disorders.

- VTCs work in collaboration with court stakeholders (i.e., prosecutors, defense counsel, etc.), as well as representatives from the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA), Veterans Services organizations, and Vet Centers. Figure 1 depicts the outcomes of a collaborative justice model.

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**10 Key Components of VTCs**

1. Integrate alcohol, drug treatment, and mental health services with justice system care processing.
2. Use of a collaborative (rather than non-adversarial) approach to promoting public safety while protecting participant’s due process rights.
3. Eligible participants are identified early.
4. Access to a continuum of treatment and rehabilitation services.
5. Abstinence is monitored by frequent testing.
6. A coordinated strategy governs VTC responses to participant’s compliance with treatment regimen.
7. Ongoing judicial interaction (i.e., active supervision) with each veteran is crucial.
8. Program goals and effectiveness are monitored and evaluated.
9. Ongoing interdisciplinary education promotes VTC planning, implementation and operation.
10. Partnerships (with the VA, public agencies and community-based organizations) generate support and enhance effectiveness.

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**Figure 1. Outcomes with collaborative legal systems**

- In June 2012, there were over 100 VTCs established across the nation. Information on training and available resources for jurisdictions interested in establishing a VTC can be found here.⁵ Additional examples of state legislation in support of VTCs can be found [here](http://justiceforvets.org/state-legislation).

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¹ More details on VTCs can be found at [www.justiceforvets.org](http://www.justiceforvets.org)
⁵ More details can be found at [http://www.justiceforvets.org/2015-vtcpi](http://www.justiceforvets.org/2015-vtcpi)
⁶ More detail can be found at [http://justiceforvets.org/state-legislation](http://justiceforvets.org/state-legislation)
Resources for Court Professionals interested in a VTC

- Dispatch from the Front Lines is a publication focused on veterans-related issues, including linking veterans to resources and benefits, opportunities for higher education, and implementing Peer-to-Peer programs.

Research on VTCs

- Although research on VTCs is limited, preliminary results suggest that VTCs may have an impact on diminishing relapse and recidivism rates among veterans (Holbrook & Anderson, 2013; Russell, 2009).

- To date, much of the literature on VTCs is descriptive (e.g., eligibility criteria, disposition of charges, graduation criteria).7
  - In 2011, 53 operating VTCs were invited to participate in a survey. A total of 14 courts responded to the survey. Eleven of these courts offered participant enrollment and graduation data.8 Of the 59 reported graduates, only one participant re.offended post-graduation (i.e., recidivism rate = less than 2%).

- In a recent study on VA-involvement in veteran’s courts and dockets, researchers found that Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) specialists were present in court on a weekly basis about 42% of the time and spent an average of 11 hours in court monthly.9

- A single article has been published that highlights the characteristics and service needs of VTC parents with minor children versus veterans with no children.10 VTC parents were more likely to have (1) served in Iraq, (2) received fire in a combat zone, and (3) been diagnosed with military-related PTSD, in comparison to veterans with no minor children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Differences between VTC Parents vs. Veterans with No Minor Children</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VTC Parents with Minor Children</td>
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<td>Clinical Characteristics</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>- PTSD was military-related</td>
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<td>- Alcohol abuse or dependency diagnosis</td>
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8 Ibid.