

**Washington is Serving Those Who Served:  
A Report on Assisting Returning Veterans (May 8)**

**Executive Summary**

Washington state is proud to be the home of 670,000 veterans. With our growing military bases and strong National Guard and Reserve presence, plus more than 2 million family members, it is not hard to see why serving the needs of our military members, veterans and their families is a priority for our leaders.

With an average of 8,000 veterans separating from the military for each of the past five years, Washington state agencies have seen a steady increase in the number of veterans and family members seeking help. We're proud to say that we are answering the call, just as our service members answered our nation's call to service.

Agencies are also increasing efforts to partner with military installations, such as Joint Base Lewis-McChord, to ensure the transition from active duty service to civilian life is as seamless as possible. These efforts are even more vital as Joint Base Lewis-McChord has increased by 15,000 personnel since 2003.

With respect to our National Guard and Reserve components, Washington has experienced one of the largest mobilizations of citizen soldiers in history. These men and women are members of our communities, co-workers, friends and neighbors. With the start of the global war on terror, they were asked to put their lives on hold and sent to duty stations thousands of miles away. They volunteered for this duty and will be the first to tell you they are only doing their job. Yet the physical, emotional and financial tolls that accompany this particular job are issues that we, as a state and nation, must be prepared to address.

Returning veterans can face a myriad of challenges as they return home from extended overseas deployments. Some need ongoing medical, mental health or readjustment counseling; others require assistance with re-employment and education; still others may face financial difficulties.

Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan are returning to homes in nearly every community in Washington. While some are close to services offered through the federal Veterans Health Administration medical centers and military bases, others live in extremely rural areas.

Not only do veterans come from diverse areas of our state, they also come from diverse backgrounds. The number of women veterans in Washington has increased by more than 9,000 since the year 2000. In the same timeframe, the number of minority veterans has also increased by nearly 9,000, including tribal veterans who are served through a unique network of tribal veterans

<b>Current Washington State Military Presence</b>	
Active Duty	60,000
Army National Guard	6,050
Army Reserve	5,202
Navy Reserve	2,189
Marine Corps Reserve	601
Air National Guard	2,283
Air Force Reserve	2,184
Coast Guard Reserve	441
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>78,950</b>

About 12,000 Washington National Guard members have been deployed; 9,856 (82%) were deployed more than once. This is nearly twice the national average of 47% who have deployed more than once.

representatives. More than a decade ago, we began providing members of Washington’s Native American tribes with Veteran Service Officer training to help them serve their fellow veterans, and found this had a positive effect on the willingness of tribal veterans to file claims for their service-related injuries. The program has grown: Today, 20 tribal veteran representatives serve 29 federally recognized tribes across Washington.

Washington is dedicated to helping veterans and their families receive the services, benefits and entitlements they have earned. We have developed a robust veterans services network composed of state agency staff and a unique partnership with eight veteran service organizations. These partnerships link veterans and their families to a wide array of services. Whether a veteran visits an American Legion Post in Ephrata, a Department of Social and Health Service Community Service Office in Walla Walla or a WorkSource Office in Aberdeen, that veteran will get the help, support and resources he or she has earned.

Our commitment to these men and women, no matter their home or background, begins while they are still on active duty. At Joint Base Lewis-McChord, the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs has a thriving state presence in both the Transition Assistance Program and the Warrior Transition Unit. By helping personnel transition from military to civilian life, we can set them on the path to stability and self-sufficiency in their own communities.

By far, the most important connection we can make in helping ensure successful transitions is the linkage to employment, education or training. Our military personnel know how to get the job done; our role is to help them get the job. Washington has streamlined the licensing and certification process for veterans and military spouses, and created pathways to certification and training that lead to family-wage jobs. We are supporting veterans on college campuses and recruiting veterans in our agencies. We work, too, with businesses to secure jobs for veterans.

For veterans whose transition home has not been smooth, we have tailored programs to meet emergency financial needs, address issues that lead to homelessness and offer support to those in our community justice systems. The causes of these situations are as unique and varied as the veterans themselves, but by surrounding veterans and their families with supportive services and reconnecting them to the pride they once felt wearing the uniform, we can help them successfully make this major transition.

The following report offers a snapshot of the work being done to ensure Washington’s veterans and their families are connected with all the benefits and entitlements earned through their military service.

### Washington Military Installations

- Camp Murray
- Fairchild Air Force Base
- Joint Base Lewis-McChord
- Naval Air Station Whidbey
- Naval Base Kitsap
- Naval Magazine Indian Island
- Naval Station Everett
- 13th Coast Guard District

## **Chapter 1**

### **Welcome Home: Separating from Service**

#### **Background**

To ensure we were prepared to meet the needs of thousands of demobilizing National Guard members and reservists, Washington state agencies, with support from First Gentleman and Vietnam veteran Mike Gregoire, crafted a memorandum of understanding.

The original memorandum signed in 2004 included eight partners. In 2006, it was expanded to 32 agencies and organizations, each vowing to work together to welcome home returnees from the global war on terror, including Operation Iraqi Freedom (Iraq), Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan) and Operation Noble Eagle (includes military operations related to homeland security and support to federal, state and local agencies).

Many military personnel had been deployed to a combat theater for the first time. Citizen soldiers from the National Guard and Reserve components were called up in numbers never before seen. We knew that readjustment following 15 to 18 months of separation from family, friends and communities would be challenging.

The homecoming process can take up to 30 days for an active duty unit coming home from war. Personnel return home, reunite with family and friends, and return to their base for briefings on benefits, medical care, readjustment counseling and other benefits. Screenings are also conducted for signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI).

For our state's citizen soldiers (those who serve in the National Guard or Reserves), demobilization is compressed to five to 14 days, and conducted at an out-of-state military installation. The process is usually a series of classroom-style briefings where new veterans spend hours listening to information on where to go once they return home. However, we understood that once these men and women got home to their families, their primary focus would be on resuming their pre-deployment lives. They would likely toss the reams of paper from the briefings in the recycle bin, and, with any luck, wouldn't have to think about the war again.

#### **Actions**

As the global war on terror began and thousands of active duty and citizen soldiers departed, our leaders, many of whom are Vietnam veterans, vowed that Washington would welcome them home and serve them.

Unfortunately, coming home isn't always that easy. Returning veterans can face a number of issues with varying degrees of severity. The signature wounds of the global war on terror are PTSD and TBI, which can be caused by a blast, an extreme change in altitude or pressure (for example, during flight) or a jarring accident. Symptoms of PTSD and TBI can be similar and often co-occur.

Yet instead of seeking professional help, some veterans self-medicate with alcohol or drugs, which can destroy family relationships, result in the loss of jobs and lead to homelessness. The good news is that there are treatments, including therapy, counseling and medication, which allow many veterans to adjust to their "new normal" and resume lives in their communities. The transition from deployment and active duty to civilian life can present these and other challenges, particularly for

members of our National Guard and Reserve components who don't have the resources of a military installation in their home communities.

Aware of these issues, leaders from Washington strengthened transitional services. As our National Guard troops prepared to return home in 2005, we developed a program of veterans services network partners who traveled to the demobilization site in Wisconsin to link returnees to all the benefits and services they were entitled to. Classroom briefings were kept to an absolute minimum. Time was instead spent filing claims for VA disability compensation for wounds received in theater, signing up for VA health care, applying for jobs and connecting to mental health counselors.

Washington's commitment to serving our returning veterans started at the top. Gov. Chris Gregoire recorded a public service announcement welcoming our troops home and urging them to call the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs to learn about the benefits and services waiting for them. "YOU were there for us; now WE are here for you" encouraged not only veterans but their families to reach out to the many Washington partners standing ready to help.

Our community providers, such as veterans services organizations, faith-based organizations and the Red Cross, joined staff from a half-dozen state and federal agencies at 12 regional town hall meetings conducted in some of the most rural parts of Washington. These meetings were offered to ensure that no matter where a National Guard or Reserve member returned home, his or her community was ready to serve.

For our active duty personnel at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, changes in the Transition Assistance Program mean that all separating military personnel will go through a mandatory transition program and have access to medical, employment, education and counseling services. Washington state employees are located on Joint Base Lewis-McChord to serve wounded warriors in the Transition Assistance Office. Our goal is to help separating personnel file claims and establish eligibility for VA programs *before* they are discharged from active duty.

Several programs to serve our returning veterans were created at the state level. Not only did we want to ensure veterans knew who to ask for help if they hit a roadblock, we also wanted to ensure they had the tools needed to get and stay employed.

- The Veterans Innovations Program was established in 2006 to provide grants and emergency assistance to veterans returning from Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Noble Eagle to promote stability and self-sufficiency. Serving those in most need, the program has made payments on 149 mortgages in arrears, 62 of which had foreclosure notices; assisted with 567 rental payments; and helped 544 individuals with employment. (The average hourly wage for veterans receiving employment

**Other Programs Serving Returning Veterans**

- County Veterans Assistance Funds
- American Legion, Temporary Assistance for Families (for families with children)
- Veterans of Foreign Wars, Unmet Needs Program
- MOMS (Mothers of Military Support )
- Operation Homefront – Washington (for wounded warriors)
- AW2 (Army Wounded Warriors)
- Minuteman Program – active drilling National Guard members

assistance through this program is \$15.89 per hour.) Initially the state allocated \$2 million, with an additional \$500,000 appropriated for 2009–11. To continue funding this important program, the Legislature authorized a veterans raffle to be operated by the Washington State Lottery. In 2011, the first veterans raffle raised \$250,000.

Financial literacy is also an important component of the Veterans Innovations Program. For some, the role of bill payer for the family was played by the deployed spouse who may not have been equipped to make sound financial decisions. For others, service in the military comes with a marked decrease in pay, which can leave families in financial ruin. Each family who uses the services of the Veterans Innovations Program undergoes financial counseling to ensure adults are prepared to handle whatever financial hurdles may be ahead. Washington has also been proactive in ensuring our military personnel and returning veterans are not victims of unscrupulous lending practices. In 2005, legislation was passed to limit the practices of predatory payday lenders around military installations.

- The Veterans Conservation Corps was set up in 2005 to help Vietnam veterans with PTSD through therapeutic outdoor activities such as habitat restoration. An AmeriCorps grant has expanded the program to help veterans seeking higher education through the Vet Corps pilot project. Vet Corps has placed recent returnees or spouses of veterans at 32 colleges and universities in the state and in the Warrior Transition Unit on Joint Base Lewis-McChord. In addition, our state has also passed laws to help students in the National Guard and Reserve receive tuition refunds if they are activated and need to withdraw from classes.
- The Yellow Ribbon Program provides National Guard and Reserve members and their families with information, services and referrals throughout all phases of the deployment cycle. The program unifies efforts among the services, other state and federal agencies, and non-governmental organizations and tailors resources to the community where members and their families reside.
- The Employment Enhancement Program was launched in 2009 by the Washington National Guard to address a 34 percent unemployment rate for National Guard members after the return of the 81<sup>st</sup> Heavy Brigade Combat Team that year. The program has demonstrated a strong return on investment by directly contributing to the employment of 911 Guard members, which has lowered the overall unemployment rate to 8.4 percent among the National Guard. Today, 17 percent of our traditional National Guard soldiers and airmen found their current employment through enhanced employment services. Washington's Adjutant General has said that service would be offered to members of *all* Reserve components and veterans in our community as part of the National Guard motto "Neighbors Helping Neighbors through a Tradition of Service." While services are focused on National Guard members and families, no veteran of any service component has been denied assistance.

### **Next Steps**

While the National Guard's largest unit, the 81<sup>st</sup> Heavy Brigade Combat Team, is not scheduled to deploy in 2012, smaller units of National Guard and Reserve components will mobilize and demobilize in communities throughout Washington. To continue improving services to these personnel, we will request authorization from the Department of Defense to conduct

demobilization briefings in theater. This will allow our team to conduct hands-on service delivery, not just informational briefings, at the demobilization site.

As our country draws down its forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, we recognize that the realities of the war are woven into the fabric of the everyday lives of thousands of Washington's families. Veterans and their families will seek our services for employment, education, counseling and health care, so we must support the network we've developed.

We must also continue to reach out and connect to veterans and their families regardless of where they ask for help. Partnerships among agencies have led to countless referrals of veterans and their families to state services. Often, it's as easy as asking clients whether they have served in the military and referring them to the Department of Veterans Affairs to determine what services they are eligible for. We are also using federal databases to identify veterans who are applying for public assistance programs to determine whether they may be eligible for veterans' programs and services, such as VA pension or disability compensation.

## Chapter 2 From Boots to Books: Education

### Background

For thousands of separating military personnel, higher education is a top priority. We are grateful to Congress for enacting a much-improved post 9/11 GI Bill that provides veterans the opportunity to support themselves and their families while they pursue their higher education goals. In fact, the number of veterans who use the GI Bill has grown by 190 percent over the past two years.

Washington quickly recognized that with thousands of new combat veterans enrolling in our state's colleges and universities, we needed to ensure our institutions were ready. One of the greatest losses many veterans feel upon exiting the military is a lack of mission or team. Veterans were taught to depend on their team for advice, support and resources, so entering the world of higher education or training without that team can be a difficult transition.

### Actions

In 2009, the Governor's Office, along with five state agencies and three higher education organizations, signed a memorandum of understanding outlining Washington's commitment to serving veterans as they pursued their higher education goals. As a result, 22 colleges and universities have signed on as a "Partner for Veteran Supportive Campuses," with three more scheduled to sign in 2012.

To become a partner, institutions must demonstrate their willingness and capacity to serve the needs of student veterans. By adopting best practices, inviting experts to train staff and administrators on veteran cultural competencies, and providing additional resources or meeting spaces, these schools have demonstrated a higher-level commitment to their veteran students.

In addition to working with college faculty and administrators, we also created a program to embed recently returned veterans in state colleges and universities as mentors and navigators to their fellow veteran students.

Known as the Vet Corps, this first-in-the-nation AmeriCorps Grant program is now active on 32 Washington campuses. Two Vet Corps members are stationed at the Warrior Transition Unit on Joint Base Lewis-McChord.

Through the Vet Corps, we touch more than 4,000 veterans, family members and active duty personnel each year to help them transition from the military to an education or training program. Our Vet Corps fosters a veteran community at the

### **Veteran-Supportive Campuses**

Central Washington University  
Clover Park Technical College  
Eastern Washington University  
Edmonds Community College  
North Seattle Community College  
Olympic College  
Pacific Lutheran University  
Peninsula College  
Pierce College  
Seattle University  
Shoreline Community College  
South Seattle Community College  
Spokane Community College  
Spokane Falls Community College  
The Evergreen State College  
University of Washington Bothell  
University of Washington Tacoma  
University of Washington Seattle  
Washington State University TriCities  
Washington State University Vancouver  
Western Washington University  
Whatcom Community College

Bellevue Community College – June 2012  
Green River Community College – June 2012  
Seattle Central Community College – May 2012

college or university so veterans can identify with their new “team.”

### **Next Steps**

While the GI Bill is far more extensive now than it was 10 years ago, we encourage Congress to revise the stipend process to follow the school year for students enrolled in full-time studies. Currently when a veteran is on a break between quarters/semesters, the living stipend is reduced. We know a veteran’s rent or mortgage will be the same amount whether the month includes spring break or Christmas, and want to work with our congressional delegation on solving this problem.

With so many veterans using the GI Bill, we also need to track how successful they are in completing a degree or training program, and whether they are enrolling in programs that will result in jobs. Today, there is no standard method to collect these completion rates. U.S. Sen. Patty Murray recently introduced legislation that would require schools to track the number of students using the GI Bill and their completion rates.

Protecting veterans from unscrupulous for-profit educational institutions is also a growing concern. While many for-profit institutions provide high-quality degree and certificate programs, some are more concerned with receiving tuition payments than on educating veterans. In recognition of this growing problem, President Obama signed an executive order May 1, 2012, to require colleges to provide more information about student outcomes and financial aid as well as set up a centralized complaint system. We will also help veterans to select accredited programs that fit their schedules and will lead to a useful degree or certification.



## Chapter 3

### Translating a Military Occupational Specialty to a Civilian Career: Employment

#### Background

Veterans know the value of doing a job well and how to work as part of a productive team. Yet with our economy still struggling to recover, Washington's veterans face unemployment at unprecedented rates. As military installations face the possibility of drawing down their forces, these problems have the potential to increase exponentially.

Federal laws protect jobs and require employers to bring back to work those National Guard members and Reservists who left to serve their country. Washington's staff in the federal Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve program does an outstanding job of helping service members with their re-employment rights. They also recognize employers who go the extra mile in supporting their citizen-soldier employees through the ESGR Patriot Award.

Employment issues can be different for those separating from years of active duty service or from an extended deployment as a National Guard or Reserve member. For instance, the Washington Army National Guard's 81<sup>st</sup> Heavy Brigade Combat Team has deployed twice since 2004. For some of the younger brigade members, the cycle of mobilization and demobilization became a pattern of employment as they knew they could count on 12 to 15 months of full-time work. Yet with the news that the 81<sup>st</sup> will not deploy in 2012, some members of the Washington Army National Guard have few prospects for employment. With unemployment insurance benefits now reduced from 99 to 73 weeks, some of these citizen soldiers may be at risk of homelessness.

#### Actions

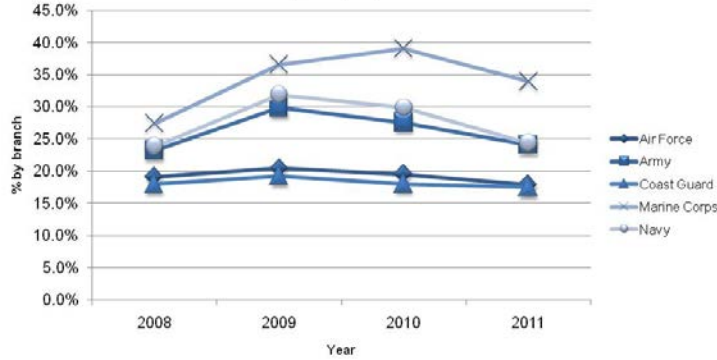
Because employment is integral to the successful transition from deployment or active duty to civilian life, Washington is working closely with the National Guard and Joint Base Lewis-McChord to ensure each separating service member completes a transition program before separating from the military. By setting expectations and creating opportunities for the service member to set job search goals and revise a résumé, we can influence outcomes after active duty.

To better understand the unemployment issues facing our returning veterans, Washington studied veteran unemployment insurance trend data over the past two years. Data were shared with Joint Base Lewis-McChord and the Department of the Army to establish a baseline for how well service members were doing before the November 2012 implementation of the mandatory Transition Assistance Program (the program had been operating on a voluntary basis). The goal is to decrease the number of weeks a service member receives unemployment insurance and boost wages and higher education graduation rates. Key findings include the following:

- One-third or fewer of our transitioning service members used their unemployment insurance benefits. The Marine Corps (34.7 percent) consistently showed a higher proportion of claims even though the Army (26.5 percent), Air Force (19.6 percent) and Navy (27.7 percent) had higher discharges. Before 2012, service members from all military components except the Marines were not required to attend Transition Assistance Programs that explain unemployment insurance laws. (Sen. Murray sponsored the Veterans Opportunity Work Act, which President Obama signed in 2011.)

## Unemployment insurance

DVA Cohort: % of veterans who claimed regular UI benefits (n=23,438)



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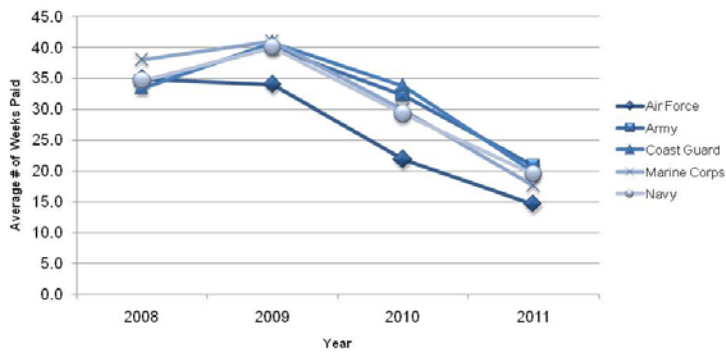
Source: DVA Data and ESD Claim Data (GUIDE)

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- The average number of weeks paid for all unemployment insurance benefits decreased over time. Veterans in the study used an average of 10 fewer weeks in 2010 than the general population.

## Unemployment insurance (continued)

DVA Cohort: average number of weeks paid regular UI, EUC, EB and Training Benefits (n=23,438)



- The average number of weeks paid for all UI benefits decreased over time.
- For all veterans in the DVA Cohort, the average number of weeks decreased from 34.9 weeks in 2008 to 19.7 weeks in 2011.
- 10 weeks less on average for veterans in 2010 than the general population.

Source: DVA Data and ESD Claim Data (GUIDE)

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- Younger service members earn significantly less than middle-age veterans.

## Median Wages by Age

Median Wages - wages per hour							
Age	Discharge Qtr	1st Qtr	2nd Qtr	3rd Qtr	4th Qtr	5th Qtr	6th Qtr
Inaccurate DOB (126 records)	\$ 15.47	\$ 18.87	\$ 18.80	\$ 21.39	\$ 20.78	\$ 20.50	\$ 20.49
18-24	\$ 10.01	\$ 10.08	\$ 10.10	\$ 10.42	\$ 10.71	\$ 10.77	\$ 10.99
25-34	\$ 15.07	\$ 14.71	\$ 15.06	\$ 15.55	\$ 15.77	\$ 16.05	\$ 16.29
35-44	\$ 23.19	\$ 23.72	\$ 23.40	\$ 24.28	\$ 24.78	\$ 24.83	\$ 25.47
45-54	\$ 25.76	\$ 26.13	\$ 26.44	\$ 26.98	\$ 26.91	\$ 27.60	\$ 27.29
55+	\$ 30.02	\$ 30.96	\$ 30.41	\$ 30.84	\$ 34.02	\$ 29.61	\$ 33.98

- Wages increased with age and over time
- Increased wages with age may show businesses value experience
- Younger vets are struggling



Sometimes the challenge in securing employment lies in translating military occupational specialties into civilian jobs. Take the example of a soldier who drives a modernized expanded capacity vehicle, or Humvee. While that job isn't likely to be advertised on monster.com, the soldier has extremely technical knowledge of computers and systems operations that would make him an asset to major corporations. What he needs is one-on-one assistance to translate his résumé from military terms to civilian terms and to emphasize many of the soft skills learned, such as critical thinking, decision making and leadership.

In Washington, this one-on-one assistance is provided in a WorkSource office. Veterans have access to teams of local veteran employment representatives and disabled veteran outreach program staff who match veterans' skills to available jobs. While government and nonprofit websites can help, a website will never replace the personal touch of personal counseling and mentoring.

Washington has demonstrated its commitment to helping veterans and their spouses find family-wage employment by passing and strengthening laws. In the past two years, we have made it easier for veterans and their spouses to transfer their skills and licenses from the military, or from other states, into licensure or certification here in Washington. We also recently expanded a hiring preference for public employment to the private sector, giving all employers the ability to seek out and hire veterans. State agencies are taking the initiative to think creatively, as demonstrated by a commercial driver's license certificate program operated by the Washington departments of Veterans Affairs and Licensing. This program allows military driving training to substitute for

civilian driving training. Veterans can test for their commercial driver’s license without investing thousands of additional dollars in redundant training.

In February 2012, Gov. Gregoire issued a letter to her cabinet directors, urging them to hire veterans for vacant positions. To facilitate hiring, she directed the Employment Security Department and Department of Personnel (now the Office of the State Human Resources Director) to provide assistance to agencies seeking to hire veterans and to veterans needing help with résumé writing or job search skills.

The effort to employ veterans extends well beyond government. Community partners play a significant role, as do our state’s businesses. Their successes will drive economic recovery and put people to work. Accordingly, we are also asking for their commitment to hire veterans.

Community leaders have developed programs such as the following:

- Hire America’s Heroes, which engages corporations in activities to educate, promote and facilitate best-practice processes and strategies for sourcing, recruiting, hiring, supporting and retaining service members and veterans.
- Veterans in Piping Program and HVAC (heating, ventilation and air-conditioning) programs, which help returning veterans to transition to civilian life, receive training and find careers with contractors. These contractors are “arming” themselves for the construction boom of the near future. The United Association of Plumbers and Pipe Fitters Union offers many programs, including a 18-week accelerated welding course. Program graduates are assured job security with good wages and excellent benefits.
- Helmets to Hardhats, which connects National Guard, Reserve and transitioning active-duty military members with high-quality career training and employment opportunities in the construction industry.
- VAPP, a veterans smart-phone application, for which Washington and Joint Base Lewis-McChord are developing a proof of concept. VAPP provides a cloud-based mobile and web application to help service members, veterans and their families locate services, benefits and resources during life’s transitions.

<p><b>Other Programs Helping Veterans Get Jobs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• America’s Heroes at Work</li><li>• Boots to Shoes</li><li>• Port of Seattle Veterans Fellowship Program</li><li>• Troops to Teachers</li><li>• Vet Success</li><li>• Veterans Careers – Military.com</li><li>• Veterans Job Bank</li></ul>
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Veterans completing the training programs listed above often rely on partnerships built in Washington to bridge gaps to support their families while completing training. By working together, our community partners and government agencies connect veterans with such benefits as unemployment insurance, veterans assistance funds available at the county level, veteran service organization benevolent funds and Washington’s Veterans Innovations Program.

To encourage entrepreneurship, we’ve created a veteran and service member-owned business registry and asked all public entities and private citizens to patronize these businesses. Our registry comprises 1,686 businesses with services ranging from advertising to construction.

## **Next Steps**

Helping our state's veterans find and retain employment is a priority for all Washington state agencies. We will increase agency hiring of veterans and encourage our private sector partners to do the same. Washington's WorkSource offices will expand efforts to help employers locate veterans for job openings. We will ensure that veterans are aware of and able to take advantage of the employment services available to them. We will also encourage employers, particularly in high-demand fields, to seek out and hire veterans through on-the-job training and apprenticeship programs. Through these efforts, we will honor our state's commitment to helping our veterans transition from military to civilian employment.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Serving All Who Served: Women Veterans**

#### **Background**

Today nearly 20 percent of all military personnel are women, nearly double the number from 1989. Of Washington's 670,000 veterans, nearly 60,000 are women. By far, the largest group of women veterans (11.6 percent) served as part of Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation New Dawn (since September 2010, this has been the designation for operations in Iraq), and women veterans are the fastest-growing group of veterans.

While women serve side-by-side with their male counterparts, it is crucial that programs and health care facilities take their specific needs into consideration when they separate from service.

#### **Actions**

To keep the issues of women veterans at the forefront, Washington created a Women Veterans Advisory Committee in 2004 composed of women veterans from around the state. Each year a summit is conducted to provide resources to women veterans, many of whom have never accessed their benefits. Their issues are followed up on an individual basis to ensure resolution. In addition, women veterans register and are referred for VA health care and mental health services that address PTSD related to military sexual trauma, war trauma or other traumatic conditions.

However, many problems faced by returning combat veterans and their families are more functional than clinical. For example, veterans may face work stress or unemployment issues. Many have educational or training needs. Women veterans who return from extended deployments and step back into their role as spouse, mother or community member can face resistance from their families and friends who have had to carry on without them. Mothers who have had to live for a year or longer without their children in their line of sight might begin to feel overprotective and pull in that newly independent child. A partner who has carried out the role of both mother and father might resent the fact that he now has to again change his role in the family. These issues must all be addressed to ensure the family unit can remain intact. For families not able to make it through the readjustment process, there can be the added burden of financial strain, court concerns and child custody issues.

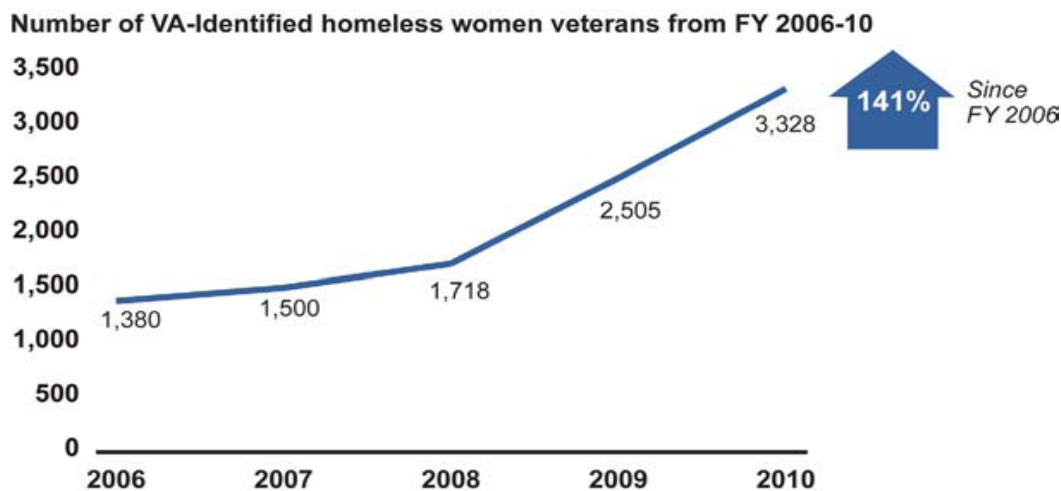
At the federal level, there has been a concerted effort to ensure the health care needs of women veterans are addressed. Today, every VA medical center has a women veterans program manager who helps women understand their benefits and coordinates their care. The American Lake VA Medical Center offers child care to ensure its lack does not become a barrier to receiving services.

Women in the military can be targets for sexual harassment and exposed to related traumatic experiences. In fact, one in five women respond "yes" to the federal VA Health Administration's survey for military sexual trauma. While both genders can experience a range of unwanted sexual behaviors, the occurrences are far more prevalent among women veterans.

Counselors from the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs who specialize in PTSD are particularly focused on veterans' issues unique to women. The department's program is composed of 25 percent women counselors, thus ensuring that women veterans and spouses can select a provider whom they feel comfortable seeing.

Washington has made ending homelessness among veterans a priority and is addressing the needs of homeless women veterans. The Department of Veterans Affairs has partnerships with the federal VA that expedite benefits and housing opportunities. Since the Building 9 for Veterans Transitional Housing program opened its doors in 2007, 20 women veterans have entered the program and successfully graduated. This program faces challenges, however, assisting veterans with children to locate community resources.

The federal Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued the report “Homeless Women Veterans” in 2011 that presents a wider snapshot. The report noted barriers that homeless women veterans face in accessing veteran housing, such as lack of awareness about programs, lack of referrals for temporary housing while waiting for placement in supportive housing, limited housing for women with children and concerns for personal safety. The GAO reports that the number of homeless women veterans increased from 1,380 to 3,328 between 2006 and 2010, or 141 percent. In comparison, the number of homeless male veterans increased from 34,137 to 49,373, or 45 percent, in the same time period.



Source: GAO analysis of VA data.

For veterans who are incarcerated at the Women’s Correctional Facility at Purdy, we have created a volunteer outreach program to help them prepare for release. Our goal is to ensure they stop their benefits upon incarceration to avoid overpayments. In addition, as they are released from incarceration, we connect them to veterans services and benefits such as VA health care, employment, child care and housing.

### Next Steps

With more women joining our Armed Forces, we know our women veterans’ population will continue to grow. Washington’s Women Veterans Advisory Committee will develop a cadre of women service officers to serve women veterans to ensure transition services are provided to women exiting military bases.

In addition, we will expand services for homeless and incarcerated women veterans. Our experience has shown that the work we do to help veterans to access the wide range of benefits they are entitled to is vital to addressing the root causes of homelessness and potential incarceration.

Extending outreach services for veterans older than 65 will ensure that women who need services beyond those funded by Medicare will be able to access their long-overdue benefits and care for service-connected conditions.

We will also continue to convene an annual gathering of women warriors. Plans for 2013 include taking the summit to Yakima or Tri-Cities so those who can't afford to travel to Western Washington will be able to attend.



## **Chapter 5**

### **Establishing a Residence: Housing/Homelessness**

#### **Background**

As military personnel separate from service, they could find themselves homeless for any number of reasons. For some, extended deployments create financial hardships that cannot be overcome. Others find that the living arrangements they had before they deployed, perhaps living with mom and dad, don't fit after a year or more in a combat zone.

Whatever the reasons, we believe that no Washington veteran should ever be homeless. Yet, in 2011, there were 2,043 homeless veterans in our state. While this is a dramatic improvement from earlier years, we are still working hard to end homelessness for veterans.

In 2009, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki announced his goal to end veteran homelessness in five years. Washington acted quickly by integrating services for homeless veterans in our statewide Homeless Action Plan and partnering with communities across the state to help veterans break the cycle of homelessness.

#### **Actions**

We recognize that no one agency or organization will solve the issue of homelessness for veterans. With that knowledge, we focused on inspiring community providers to join forces and apply for federal homeless funding to serve veterans in their communities.

Our state has one of the nation's more active networks of public and private housing agencies. Entities participating in the creation of low-income housing for homeless and disabled individuals and families typically include local housing authorities, financial intermediaries and nonprofit housing providers in addition to the state Housing Trust Fund and the Washington State Housing Finance Commission.

In 2010, Washington convened the "Homeless Veterans Housing Summit – A Call for Action." Nearly 200 participants created a five-year veterans housing production plan and strategized how to position Washington providers to receive federal resources. Following this statewide gathering, a series of regional summits was convened to give communities tools to help them serve the unique needs of veterans in every corner of our state.

As a result of the summit, Washington set aside \$3 million of its 2011–13 Biennium Housing Trust Fund appropriation to construct or rehabilitate facilities for homeless veterans. These funds must be matched with federal funding to maximize their value.

### Washington State Regional Veterans Housing Capacity Summits



The summits also led to community partners applying for and receiving grant funds for housing services. For example, Catholic Community Services of Western Washington was selected to manage the Puget Sound Region's \$2 million Veteran's Homeless Prevention Program, a three-year effort launched in April 2011 to serve more than 350 recently separated veterans. The program targets the communities surrounding Joint Base Lewis-McChord and Camp Murray, and reaches out to veterans returning from Iraq or Afghanistan. Veterans who are at risk of homelessness, or who are currently homeless, receive community-based housing and other supportive services to address underlying issues.

Through its partnership with Catholic Community Services, the Department of Veterans Affairs provides on-site staff support to ensure veterans are connected with their benefits, including counseling, medical care and disability compensation. In the first five months of the program, 100 veterans were screened and 60 were housed using these grant funds.

While we provide services to homeless veterans, we know that preventing a veteran from becoming homeless in the first place is our wisest course of action. Over the past two years, Washington has partnered with Joint Base Lewis-McChord as it works to redesign the Army Transition Assistance Program, which helps soldiers plan for life after active duty. Before 2012, the program was voluntary, and not all personnel took advantage of its services. This led to new veterans living in our communities who had little knowledge of benefits that could help them and their families through life's struggles. The new model, which will be mandatory for all branches of the service in November 2012, will be customer-focused and begin 12 months before separation from active duty. The Veterans Opportunity to Work, Hire Heroes Act of 2011 further mandates participation in these programs, so Washington will have the means to reach each separating service member and give him or her the tools for a successful transition.

Washington manages several federal grants that assist homeless veterans. The Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program serves veterans in both urban and rural areas. Grant funds are employment-focused and cover work readiness, skills development, job preparation and employment placement. Other resources connect veterans with treatment and counseling services, case management and



To further efforts to reach all separating military personnel and deliver resources prior to their discharge, Joint Base Lewis-McChord and the Department of Veterans Affairs were invited to participate in the Army Transition Summit in Washington, D.C., in 2011 to discuss implementation of the newly mandatory Transition Assistance Program. As a result of this meeting, the U.S. Department of Labor's [Veterans' Employment and Training Services](#) program is considering Joint Base Lewis-McChord as a pilot location for an updated workshop to develop strategies for finding employment and receiving benefits and health care.

More services targeted to homeless women veterans are also needed. While many of the grant and per diem programs, such as Building 9 for Veterans, offer services to women veterans without children, very few can accommodate veterans with families. Washington is planning a women veterans' grant and per diem program on the campus of the Washington Soldiers Home. This program will be managed as a public-private partnership with the WestCare Foundation, a family of tax-exempt nonprofit organizations that offers a spectrum of health and human services in residential and outpatient settings. Services include substance abuse and addiction treatment, homeless and runaway shelters, domestic violence treatment and prevention, and mental health programs.

The Department of Veterans Affairs will continue to increase awareness and encourage involvement in the VA secretary's plan to end veteran homelessness and inspire community leaders to seek federal funding to prevent and/or end homelessness. We will synchronize with our county partners so they can collectively be positioned to secure federal funding during the next five years.

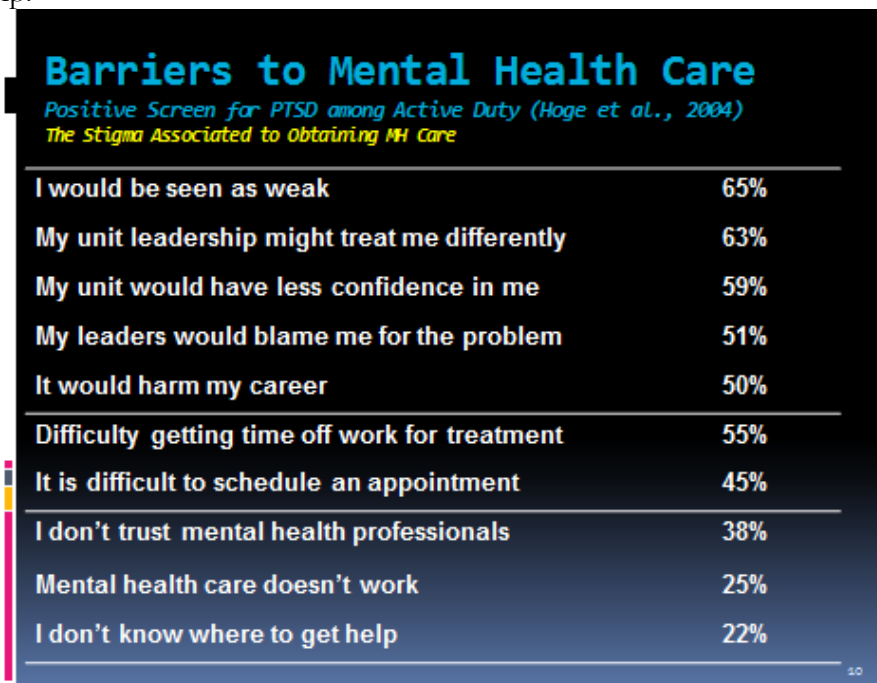
## Chapter 6

### Recovering from Injuries: Behavioral Health Programs & PTSD/War Trauma Outpatient Program/TBI

#### Background

For the past 12 years, military personnel have carried out missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Sustaining combat forces for such an extended period comes at a price. Between 15 and 18.5 percent of service members returning from Iraq or Afghanistan have PTSD or depression, and 19.5 percent report experiencing a TBI during deployment. Once discharged from the military, PTSD and other mental health diagnoses rise to 31 percent. Fully 47 percent of returning military veterans report having readjustment problems.

While self-sufficiency is a valuable trait in combat, it may be less so for current and former military members with respect to their personal and behavioral health choices. Stigma related to mental health labels and treatments often results in self- and family-destructive behaviors that have tremendous adverse effects on families and communities. The attached chart offers a few of the reasons active duty personnel and veterans routinely give for not seeking behavioral or mental health help.

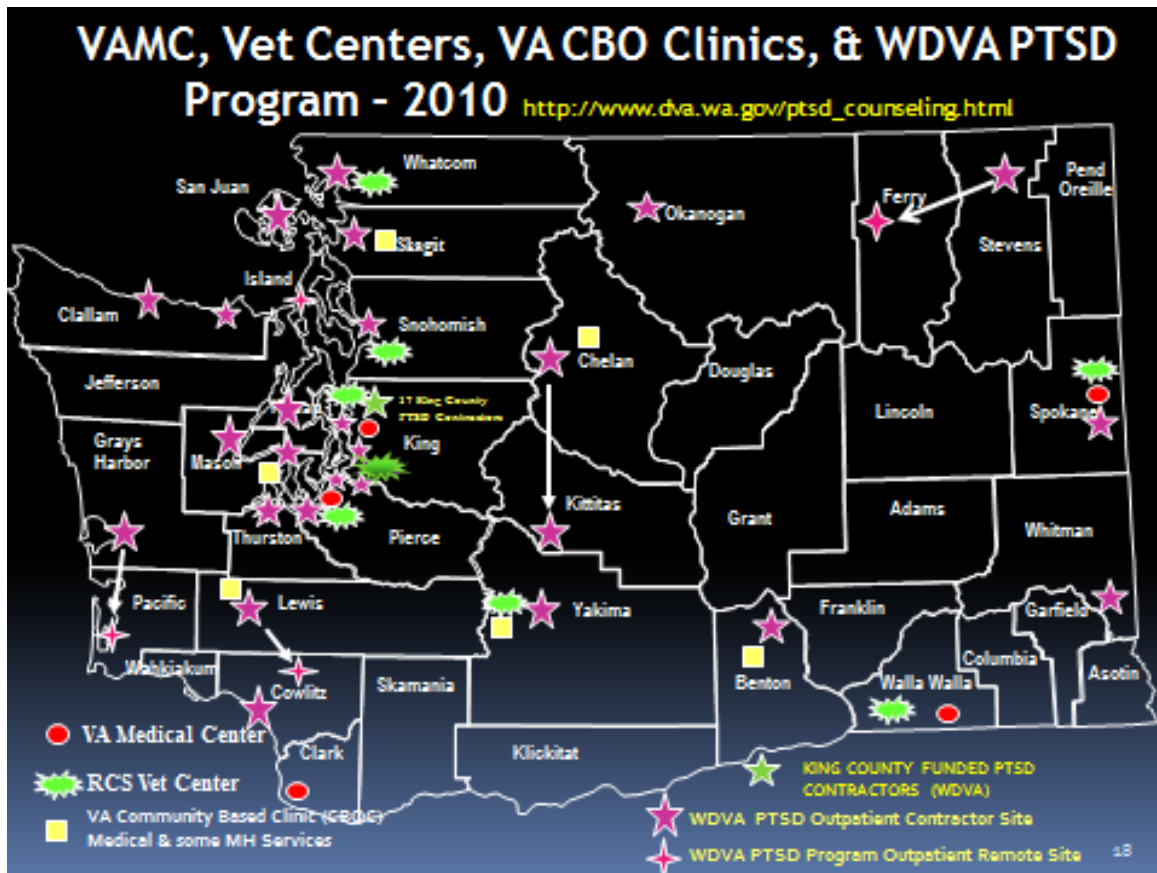


A chilling result of this dynamic of not seeking professional assistance is that these disorders led to more hospitalizations among members of the military in 2009 than any other problem.

The cumulative lengths of deployments, number of traumatic experiences, and insufficient rebound and recovery time are associated with more emotional difficulties among military members and military children, and more mental health diagnoses among Army wives.

#### Actions

To meet the needs of returning veterans, Washington operates a PTSD outpatient program to these members and their families. In fact in 1984, Washington became the first state in the nation to offer such a program. Today, 33 professional mental health contractors (representing more than 60 providers with an average 24 years of experience) offer outpatient treatment throughout the state. These licensed mental health professionals (psychologists, mental health counselors and clinical social workers) care for more than 3,500 veterans and family members at no cost and with no visit limit. The map below offers a view of the location of the PTSD program providers, along with all other services offered by U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.



The effects of war-related PTSD are felt by more than the combat veteran: Approximately half the clients are spouses and children. Accordingly, this program delivers counseling services that are less formal in nature, easy to access and offer the highest level of confidentiality possible. Licensed mental health professional contractors represent a wide range of specialized treatment services, which include individual, couples, family and veteran group counseling. Some contractors offer group services to women veterans and spouses of veterans. Veterans may be referred to specialized inpatient or outpatient treatment offered by the federal VA medical centers in the state.

Because the effects of PTSD are felt by every member of a veteran's family, the state budget signed by Gov. Gregoire in 2007 provided pilot funding for K-12 schools with a significant number of National Guard and active duty member families. The two-year project was so effective that King County also supported *other* programs for children who needed peer support, resiliency training,



after-school activities and other help to bridge the stressful lives they led as a result of pre-deployment, deployment and the post-deployment periods. In addition, a psychologist is working with Thurston County schools while another provider works in Pierce County in after-school and family-focused services for children.

Operation Military Kids is supported by government agencies, military and business leaders, and others to assist military children who are dealing with the deployment of a family member. The program has organized several annual conferences for families and children with active duty or National Guard or Reserve parents. Training and stories of resiliency have inspired school leaders, teachers, counselors and parents.

In addition to those suffering from PTSD, 17 percent of veterans who served in Iraq or Afghanistan are likely to experience some level of a TBI. In fact, PTSD and TBI often co-occur, which can confuse the diagnosis and doubly impair the survivor.

Advances in battlefield trauma care mean we are seeing military personnel returning from war with injuries that earlier would have resulted in death. Today, more than 90 percent of wounded military personnel survive severe trauma experiences, unlike soldiers who served in Vietnam and earlier combat theaters.

While some believe that TBI injuries occurred in most of our nation's wars, it is probable we are seeing cases today that are harder to detect. As a result, the Department of Defense and Federal VA Health Administration have developed and are using standard TBI screening tools. This is important because measures used at the beginning of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan made it easy for active duty personnel to answer questions in such a way as to avoid being diagnosed with a TBI, which could end their careers.

The science and practice of accurately diagnosing TBI continues to evolve. The Department of Defense, VA and now many neurologists and neuropsychologists are applying diagnostic tools to identify veterans who may have returned months or even years ago but were never diagnosed with this unseen injury. The problem is made worse by veterans who avoid care due to a stigma attached to mental health and behavioral health care or do not wish to seek help generally.

Our strong partnerships with the Washington National Guard and with leadership on Joint Base Lewis-McChord facilitate identification of individuals who need services while they are still on active duty to ensure resources are in place when they separate.

To reach veterans who are reluctant to seek counseling or treatment, we developed alternative outreach opportunities. Through an AmeriCorps grant, our state's Veteran Conservation Corps was expanded to include a mentorship program for veterans on college campuses and in the community. Known as the Vet Corps, this team of 31 recent returnees and military spouses connects veterans with training, education, internships and employment. Vet Corps also refers veterans to an array of wrap-around services. Vet Corps members also work closely with the PTSD counselors in their communities. Two members are stationed the Warrior Transition Unit on Joint Base Lewis-McChord and work with medically separated soldiers to identify educational and career goals.

Washington has also adopted a local approach to identifying veterans in our colleges and universities who may be suffering from TBI. Through a grant from the state's TBI Commission, a Veterans Conservation Corps TBI coordinator reaches out to these veterans to help them navigate the higher education process and access benefits. In addition, information is shared with college staff and faculty about TBI and how the school can help returning veterans and others with it. Training is also available for community organizations interested in learning more.

In 2011, the TBI coordinator followed up with 103 veterans with suspected TBIs, many of whom have now been screened by the VA, and saw 65 new veterans who may be suffering from an undiagnosed TBI. The TBI program is screening incarcerated and homeless veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and/or Operation Enduring Freedom to determine whether there is a higher incidence of TBI in these vulnerable groups. The TBI coordinator will provide presentations at the state's TBI conference in spring 2012.

As veterans returned to every corner of our state, we worked to ensure communities were prepared to welcome them home. The Veteran Training Support Center is a joint effort among King County Human Services Division; the behavioral health program operated by the Department of Social and Health Services; Milspec Advisory Group, a private consulting firm; and Edmonds Community College. The center provides veteran culture- and veteran trauma-focused training to first responders, behavioral health providers and mental health treatment professionals, who are often the first to encounter a veteran during a crisis. The training has proven to be vital for favorable outcomes, not only during crises but when a veteran or other trauma-affected person presents for care.

In 2010, we trained 1,840 professionals and community providers. In 2011, this number rose to 5,230 individuals through 99 topic-specific training events and conferences. We expect the trainings to become increasingly diverse and in-depth over time. Our goal is to raise awareness and understanding of issues specific to veterans such as PTSD and TBI, and to encourage agency, institution staff and private practice providers to establish best practices that will empower this population in their reintegration in their communities and pursuit of personal, academic and career goals.

### **Next Steps**

We recognize the unique needs of our returning veterans with TBI and PTSD. As a result, the Department of Veterans Affairs has placed a high priority on creating a therapeutic community at the Washington Soldiers Home in Orting. Through a memorandum of understanding with the WestCare Foundation, we plan to transform several buildings to provide care and rehabilitation for wounded warriors. Therapies will include horticulture, companion dog training, TBI and PTSD counseling, and help in developing marketable skills and creating opportunities for entrepreneurship.

We are also exploring a partnership with the veteran nonprofit group GAVE (Green Alliance for Veterans Education) where Washington will lease up to 12 acres of land to GAVE for a veterans agriculture project. GAVE is managed by young Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom veterans who offer creative transition assistance programs for returning veterans. Veterans dealing with the effects of TBI and PTSD will learn agriculture skills, raise produce and gain small business skills for pursuing a vocation in agronomy. Some of the food will be sent directly to the Soldiers Home for residents.



We know veterans and their families will rely on counseling services for years to come. Even today, we find veterans from previous war eras, particularly Vietnam, asking for help for the first time. The systems of support we've created will provide resources to veterans and their families as we continue to tailor programs to fill this niche.

## Chapter 7

### Helping Incarcerated Veterans: Veterans Courts

#### Background

Veterans may face a host of issues when they return to their communities. The physical and emotional wounds of war alone take a serious toll, with PTSD and TBI becoming known as the signature wounds of the past 10 years of war. Precipitating factors or conditions leading to contact with our county justice systems include these disorders as well as marital and family issues, untreated drug and alcohol abuse, unemployment, poverty and homelessness.

In Washington, Pierce County courts are handling the greatest number of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans, but it is likely that all our local justice systems have encountered at least one returning veteran.

#### Actions

Washington has taken a proactive approach to serving incarcerated veterans. Our mission begins with raising awareness by interested county partners on the benefits and elements of implementing a program tailored to meet the needs of their veteran population. We are working to educate local leaders on the benefits of serving their veterans not only to ensure veterans are able to transition from incarceration to their community successfully, but also because of the potential for savings to already struggling local budgets.

Since 1996, several of Washington's 39 counties have developed veteran court programs or veteran dockets. These programs often mimic mental health or drug courts that have been used by local jurisdictions for years. We have partnered with King County to offer reintegration services to incarcerated veterans and expanded these programs to Clark, Pierce and Thurston counties. The programs offer alternatives to jail, assistance in release planning and referrals to a variety of public and private services, depending on need.

Most veteran courts have eligibility and access criteria that include non-sex offense felonies, no violent or strike crimes, a specific mental health diagnosis and voluntary participation. In 2011, more than 4,000 veterans and active duty personnel had contact with the Pierce County corrections system. In King County, the total was approximately 1,500 veterans and in Clark County, approximately 250. The difference in number of cases in Pierce County is due to the fact that Joint Base Lewis-McChord, the state's largest military installation, is situated there.

While we hope military personnel and veterans do not enter local justice systems, the good news is these programs are working. Participants in the veterans courts and dockets experience a recidivism rate between 6 and 10 percent, compared to more than 60 percent for the general jail population. The lower recidivism rates and cost avoidance in jail bed days translate into significant savings to participating counties.

To ensure veterans are engaged in the veterans court or docket programs, these specialty courts employ a variety of graduated sanctions for failure to comply with court-imposed conditions. Sanctions could include increased reporting requirements and drug testing. Failure to complete all court conditions can lead to imposition of the original charges and prison sentence.

Washington and Pierce County worked with Joint Base Lewis-McChord to identify a justice liaison for active duty personnel. Now county corrections staff can consult with this liaison if there are suicide, mental health or other concerns.

At the state level, the Department of Veterans Affairs offers the following services:

- Screening for eligibility
- Assessment and referral to the VA health care system for treatment, including drug, alcohol and mental health counseling
- Assistance with court appearances and early release conditions
- Referral to transitional housing upon release from the jail
- Referrals to employment and training services
- Assistance accessing other VA benefits, including pensions and benefits
- Access to resources for employment and family support

Washington is collecting information on veterans who may qualify for services either while incarcerated or upon release in participating counties. This information is available through local booking and charging data, which typically separate active duty personnel from veterans.

In addition to access to federal VA services, strong community partnerships are essential to effective veteran courts. We partner with local service providers to ensure that veterans are made aware of and connected to services they need. These service providers often include WorkSource, veteran service organizations and homeless service providers. We also educate enforcement and corrections personnel in addition to medical and mental health staff who work in jails where we provide county programs. We regularly participate in county-organized provider meetings to foster communication and support among service providers.

Washington has developed a program to identify veterans who are incarcerated in state prison to assist them with their veterans benefits and prevent VA overpayments, which arise if a veteran who receives service-connected disability compensation is incarcerated for more than 60 days. In this case, benefits are typically reduced to the 10 percent rate on the 61<sup>st</sup> day of incarceration following a conviction. Although it is the veteran's responsibility to notify the VA if he or she is convicted and incarcerated for more than 60 days, many are unaware they need to do so.

Veterans who are incarcerated are often unaware, too, that they or their family may apply for a VA apportionment of their benefits if their spouse, guardian of minor children or dependent parents can demonstrate financial need. An apportionment allows a portion of the veteran's disability compensation to be provided to the veteran's dependent family.

Assisting incarcerated veterans with re-starting their benefits upon release from prison and ensuring that veterans in a Department of Corrections work-release program are enrolled in the VA health care system are also important elements of Washington's program. Because most work-release participants use the four work-release sites in King County, we are working with funds from the King County Veterans Levy to identify these veterans to help them transition successfully from incarceration to life in their communities. This includes restarting their VA benefits, enrolling in VA health care, finding suitable housing and looking for employment.

**Next Steps**

With Washington's large military presence and sizable veteran population, we anticipate that veterans will continue to enter local court systems. While we have made tremendous inroads in serving the needs of incarcerated veterans, we will continue to work with counties. Even for counties that do not have large-enough veteran populations to warrant full veteran court or docket programs, we still have many opportunities to connect veterans to benefits and services that may keep them from going back to jail.

We are also helping veterans transition from incarceration to housing and employment. More work, however, is needed to ensure communities have resources so veterans are less likely to re-offend.