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# Responding to the Needs of Justice-Involved Veterans

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## Goals for Today

- Describe PTSD and TBI
- Raise awareness about what to expect in interactions with those who have these diagnoses
- Feel comfortable with interactions with those with PTSD or TBI
- Gain a knowledge about Veterans Treatment Courts and the problem solving court model.



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The stresses and effects of combat on behavioral health are fairly well documented. PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury, and general readjustment issues sometimes manifest themselves in Veterans as crisis encounters with law enforcement or first responders.

The community's response to this crisis can have a major impact on the Veteran, the Veteran's family, and the community itself.

Appropriate intervention at the earliest possible point can make all the difference between keeping that Veteran a productive member of society or a costly casualty of a lost opportunity.



## Decision Making

- Readjustment to home life requires a range of options for making decisions that may be very different from those that were useful in the war.



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### Response Tactics

- While “act first, think later” may be the best response in a war zone, most responses at home are better approached with a “think first, act later” strategy. Veterans may have to relearn how to regulate their responses.
- For example: There they had priority on the road and were able to shoot or run over any car in their way as they had the right of way



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## Combat Zone Stresses & Traumas

Soldiers returning from Iraq:

- 95% observed dead bodies or human remains
- 93% were shot at, or received small arms fire
- 89% were attacked or ambushed
- 65% observed injured or dead Americans
- 48% were responsible for the death of an enemy combatant



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# Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)





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# Signs & Symptoms of PTSD

Hyperarousal

Vigilance

Agitation

Anger issues

Violence

Anxiety

Isolation

Insomnia

Nightmares

Flashbacks

Avoidance

Numbing

Suicide





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# There are Effective Treatments for PTSD

- Many Veterans with PTSD are reluctant to seek help because:
  - They don't think treatment will help
  - They see treatment-seeking as a sign of personal weakness
  - They are concerned about reactions of others
- There are effective treatments for PTSD that can:
  - Reduce PTSD symptoms
  - Improve mood
  - Improve family and work functioning



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- There are Effective Treatments for PTSD
- In treatment, Vets...
  - Connect with other Veterans
  - Rethink negative beliefs about what happened (e.g., self-blame or guilt)
  - Learn to revisit their painful memories with less distress
  - Learn coping skills
- Most Veterans are very satisfied with VHA PTSD care
- It takes courage and strength to go for treatment



# Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

- A traumatic brain injury is a blow or jolt to the head or a penetrating head injury that disrupts the function of the brain.
- The severity of such an injury may range from mild to severe.
- A TBI can result in short- or long-term problems with independent function.



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# TBI – Common Enduring Symptoms

## Cognition

- Motor/sensory disturbances
- Impairments in:
- Language, communication
  - Attention, concentration, memory
  - Learning new information
  - Speed of information processing
  - Judgment, decision-making, problem-solving, insight

## Mood

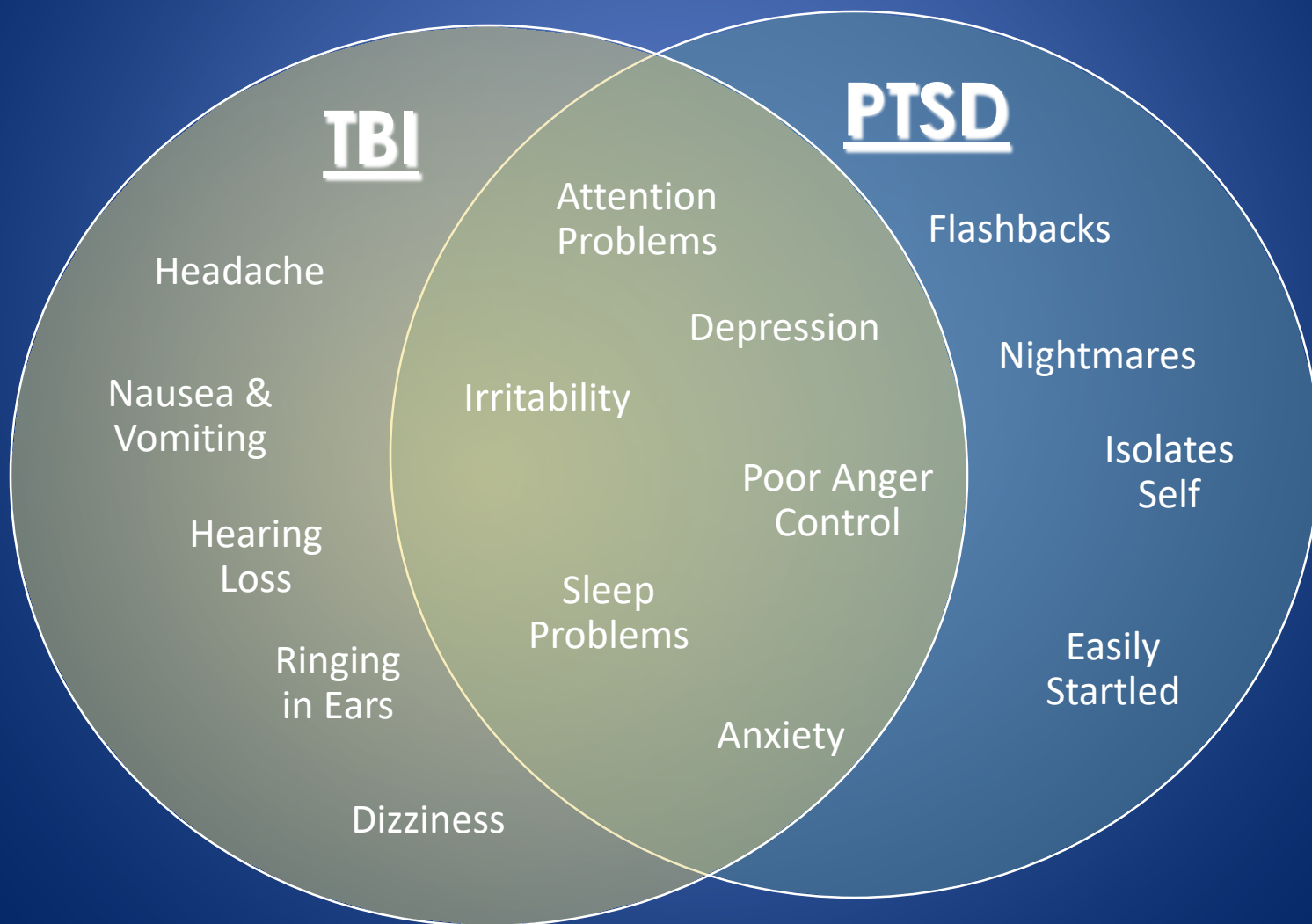
- Apathy/Depression
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Emotional lability
- Insensitivity
- Egocentricity

## Behavior

- Lack of initiation
- Disinhibition
- Impulsivity
- Restlessness
- Aggression
- Agitation



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# TBI in Veterans

- TBI represents ~ 22% of confirmed injuries in Iraq/Afghanistan War veterans.
- Many veterans have experienced multiple TBI's due to chronic exposure to blasts
- As many as 50% to 60% of veterans with chronic blast exposure have significant hearing loss or tinnitus ("ringing" in the ears)  
(Lew, et al. 2007)



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# What is Most Helpful When Interacting with Veterans with TBI?



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# Slowed Processing Speed

- Be patient and maintain a calm attitude.
- Recognize that thinking more slowly does not equal lower intelligence.
- Speak more slowly, with slightly longer pauses than usual.
- Allow more time for Veteran to respond.





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## VETERANS IN JAILS



- Most recent United States Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) (2002) data, indicates 9.3% of people incarcerated are veterans.
  - 70% non-violent
  - 82% of those released from jails are eligible for VA
- BJS (2006) 60% of all US jail inmates had mental health problem.
  - 5 in 6 with MH Dx had received no previous
- BJS (2002) found 65% had alcohol or drug dependency problem
- Historically, reports of Vietnam and Post-Vietnam era Veterans with histories of civilian and military trauma suggest an association between trauma and subsequent contact with the legal system.



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- The Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) initiative is designed to provide outreach to Veterans in contact with the justice system through encounters with police, jails, and courts.
- The goal of the VJO program is to provide timely access to Veterans Administration (VA) services for eligible justice-involved Veterans to avoid unnecessary criminalization and incarceration of Veteran defendants and offenders with mental illness and/or traumatic brain injury (TBI).
- The Veterans Justice Outreach program is a key initiative supporting prevention for this at-risk population and offers Veterans Health Administration (VHA) healthcare as an alternative to incarceration for eligible Veterans with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health conditions, TBI, substance use disorders, and/or homelessness.





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- Both the VJO and HCRV Programs are funded/designated Homeless Programs in the Homeless Program Office in VACO within the Office of Mental Health Services. The programs are part of the Secretary's T-21 Homelessness Prevention initiatives, designed to prevent at-risk Veterans from becoming homeless

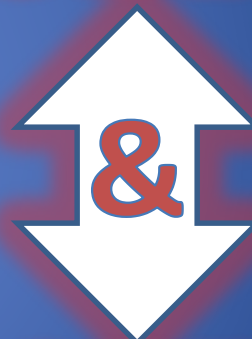


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## The VJO Coordinator will:

- ❑ Provide direct outreach, assessment, and case management for justice-involved veterans in local courts and jails.
- ❑ Assist with eligibility determination, enrollment, and referral to both VA and non-VA services upon release.
- ❑ Provide training to local law enforcement on veterans' issues and offer strategies to help work with veterans.
- ❑ Provide information and education to courts and attorneys about veterans' issues and services available.
- ❑ Collaborate with judges and specialty courts to connect veterans to VA treatment services and homeless programs.
- ❑ Develop and implement separate Veteran Treatment Courts if need is determined.

**EDUCATION**



**TRAINING**



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## Justice-involved Veteran is:

- A Veteran in contact with local law enforcement who can be appropriately diverted from arrest into mental health or substance abuse treatment.
- A Veteran in local jail, either pretrial or serving a sentence.
- A Veteran involved in adjudication or monitoring by a court.



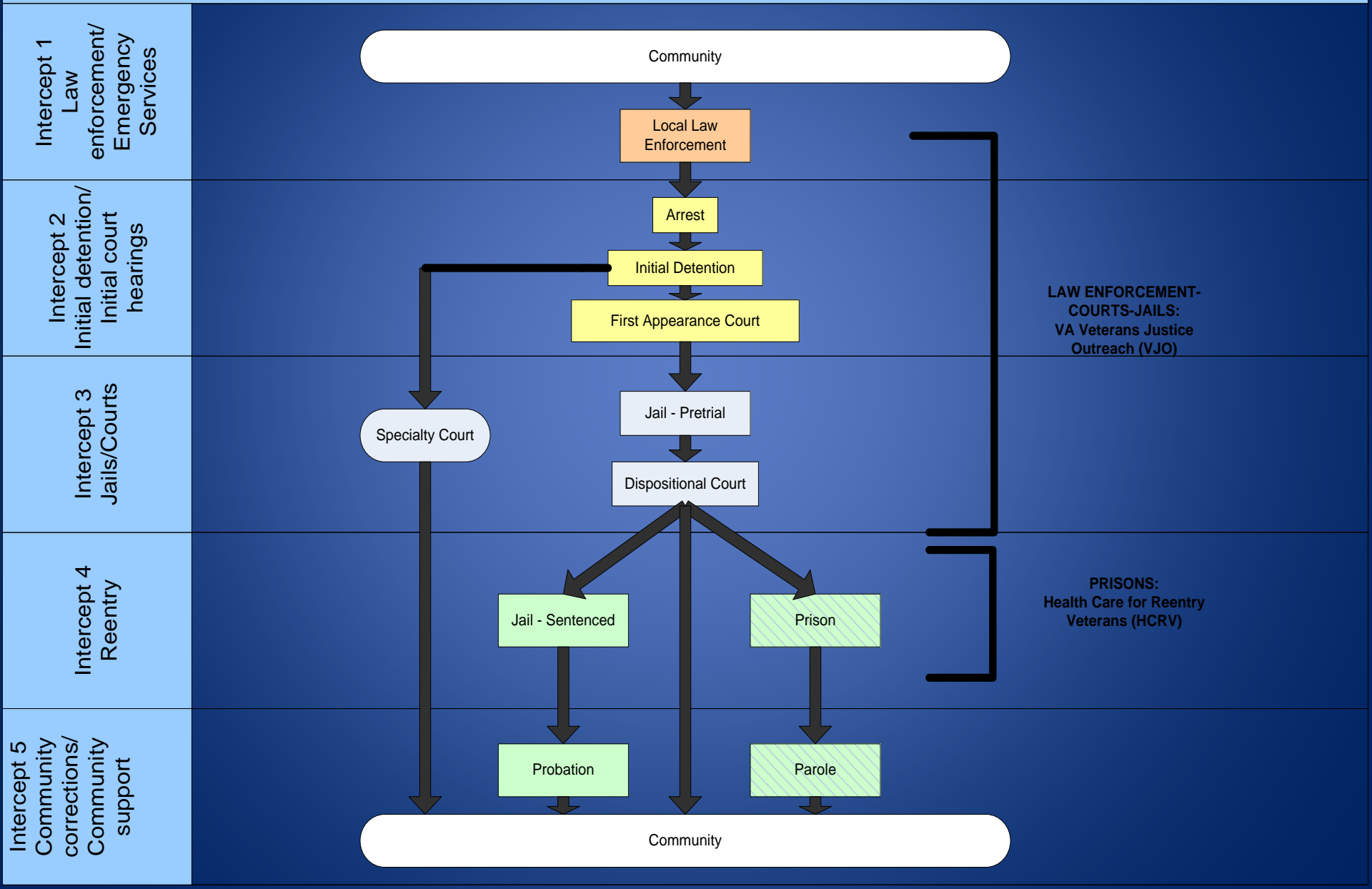


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# Overview of VA's Initiatives with the Justice System





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*Veterans Treatment Courts* - hybrid Drug /Mental Health Courts Models to serve veterans struggling with addiction, serious mental illness and/or co-occurring disorders.

Currently 95 Veterans Treatment Courts in Operation







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## Veterans Treatment Courts

- Expedite “access to care” for Veterans
- Ease the burden on valuable community resources
- Allow Veterans to go through the court process with those who are similarly situated and have past experiences
- Provide volunteer Veteran Mentors
- Promote Veteran accountability
- Promote sobriety, recovery and stability through a coordinated response including treatment in conjunction with judicial monitoring



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- Currently established Veterans Courts within VANIHCS .
- Delaware County VJO Eric Dungan, LCSW
- Muncie City VJO Eric Dungan, LCSW
- Grant County VJO Eric Dungan, LCSW
- Madison County VJO Eric Dungan, LCSW
- St. Joseph County VJO Rita Wynn, LCSW
- Allen County VJO Rita Wynn, LCSW



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# VANIHCS Veterans Justice Outreach:

## NEXT STEPS

- Provide outreach and education on Veterans' health issues and VA services to:
  - Law Enforcement 
  - Courts/Probation 
  - Jails 
- Improve access points to assist with diversion to treatment when appropriate
- Enhance relationships with community stakeholders
- Educate VANHICS employees on VJO and HCRV programs
- **WORK WITH JUSTICE PARTNERS TO ESTABLISH VETERANS TREATMENT COURTS TO COLLABORATE WITH VANIHCS.**



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- Counties set to Meet with VANIHCS to discuss Veterans Treatment Courts.
- Howard County 1/14/14
- Henry County 1/24/14
- A third VJO position will need to be established in order to provide Howard and Henry Counties with the appropriate level of responsiveness for those Veterans Courts.



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Questions?