

# ALLEGHENY COUNTY VETERANS TREATMENT COURT

## Veteran Participant Handbook

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System would like to express our gratitude to Veterans Court Supervising Judge Susan Evashavik DiLucente, the Allegheny County Veterans Court Team, and to the late Judge John A. Zottola, for their input, assistance, and guidance in creating the Veterans Court Participant Handbook.

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**VA**



**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

Veterans Health Administration  
*VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System*

## What is Allegheny County Veterans Treatment Court?

Veterans Court is a treatment court designed to serve justice involved Veterans struggling with addiction/substance abuse issues, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, or other serious mental health issues, homelessness, reintegration, or other issues. The Court is in a unique position to assist Veterans who have honorably served our country in accessing a support system of government and community-based resources in order to regain stability in their lives.

Veterans Court is a structured program that emphasizes accountability and personal responsibility. The Court connects qualifying Veterans to services, intensive treatment, and support while promoting sobriety, recovery, and stability through the coordinated efforts of the Veterans Court partners. Veterans Court also provides participating Veterans the opportunity to benefit from the assistance, support, guidance, and encouragement of a fellow Veteran Mentor while the veteran is involved in the legal process. With a focus on resource coordination and guided rehabilitation, Veterans Court is not only an appropriate manner with which to support our Veterans and active military, but it also offers justice-involved Veterans the chance to conquer problems and to get their lives back on track, as well as provides the community with an opportunity to give back to the men and women who have offered their lives to protect us and who often suffer from the devastating emotional wounds of war.

## Veterans Court Team Members

The Veterans Court team is comprised of a group of people and organizations who have a strong desire to help Veterans. The team is comprised of the Court and court related offices, VA providers, and community partners, who work together to best meet the needs of the Veteran during the Veteran's time in this program. This multi-disciplinary team meets two times every month to review each Veteran's progress and treatment needs.

## How Do the Veterans Court Team Members Help?

### **Supervising Judge**

The Supervising Judge oversees Court proceedings and decisions regarding Veterans Court cases and participants

### **District Attorney**

The District Attorney's Office (DA) prosecutes all Veterans Court cases. The Assistant District Attorney (ADA) works with the team to determine which cases are appropriate for acceptance to the court, and by making an appropriate case offer regarding charges, sentence and conditions, as well as monitoring compliance with the court-imposed sentence and all other conditions of the Court.

### **Defense Counsel**

The Defense partner represents the Veteran in all aspects of the Veteran's criminal case issues and reviews. For cases where the Veteran already has counsel on a case accepted to Veterans Court, the defense partner works with the Veteran's original attorney to transition the Veteran into the Veterans Court program.

### **Probation**

The Probation Officer (PO) is responsible for supervision of sentence and probation, and monitors compliance with all aspects and conditions of the Veteran's sentence, which may include the following: drug and alcohol testing, field visits, and reporting.

### **Veterans Justice Outreach**

The Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) specialist advocates for and ensures the Veteran is connected with the appropriate mental health and substance abuse treatment at the VA and in the community. The VJO specialist will also refer the Veteran to housing and employment services as needed.

### **Veteran Peer Mentor Coordinator**

The Veteran Peer Mentor Coordinator is responsible for recruiting, training, and matching Veterans with a peer mentor, and provides ongoing supervision to all.

### **Veteran Peer Mentor**

A Veteran Peer Mentor is a fellow Veteran who has been specially trained to act as a coach and advocate for the Veterans participating in Veterans Court.

### **Office of Behavioral Health, Justice Related Services**

The Office of Behavioral Health (OBH)/Justice Related Services (JRS) provides services to Veterans with qualifying military service, but who do not otherwise qualify for VA services, or choose not to receive their care at the VA. OBH/JRS will connect these Veterans with community providers.

### **Veterans Leadership Program of Western Pennsylvania**

Veterans Leadership Program (VLP) is a community provider offering a variety of services and supports to Veterans, including housing, employment, and case management services.

### **The Vet Center**

The Vet Center provides counseling and outreach services to all Veterans who served in a combat zone and offers connection to VA or community services. This community based counseling center provides a wide range of social, psychological, family, and reintegration services to service members and their families.

## Program Rules, Expectations, and Tips for Success

Upon admission to Veterans Court, each Veteran is provided with an individualized service plan, but certain requirements must be followed by every Veterans Court participant, and include the following:

- Demonstrate decorum and respect at all times towards the Court, Veterans Court team members, participants, and all fellow Veterans
- Comply with the individualized service plan developed by VA Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) or JRS specialist, which may include any number of programs available for, and specifically tailored to Veterans
- Sign all medical, mental health, or other consent and/or authorization forms as requested or instructed for all treatment and/or programs
- Attend all treatment and appointments. Ongoing treatment and/or recovery are required throughout your time in Veterans Court. You are expected to comply with all treatment and prescribed medications
- Take all prescription medicine as indicated
- The use of illegal drugs and alcohol is strictly prohibited, as is the abuse of prescription medications, and synthetic drugs such as K-2 or bath salts
- Submit to all drug/alcohol testing as requested
- Live at the reported and agreed upon address. Current address information must be maintained with the court, probation, VJO, and defense counsel. You may not live, work, or travel outside of Allegheny County without prior approval from the Court.
- Attend every court review hearing as scheduled
- Maintain good, regular contact with your PO and report to him/her as directed as well as comply with all rules of probation supervision
- Maintain good, regular contact with your assigned VJO or JRS
- Maintain regular contact with your Veteran Peer Mentor and/or other sponsor
- Comply with all terms of probation and service plan, which may include the following:
  - Compliance with all treatment, appointments, and medication
  - Participation in anger management classes
  - Attend AA and/or NA meetings as outlined by your service plan, or as requested by the Court, probation or VJO
  - No contact with named persons or geographical areas
  - All other recommendations, as indicated by the Court
  - Pay restitution, costs, fines, and fees as ordered to the best of your ability
  - Obey all laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

## Positive Reinforcement and Success in the Court

Compliance with the rules and expectations of Veterans Court will result in positive outcomes which may include any or all of the following:

- Acknowledgement in open court of Veteran's progress and success in program
- Decreased reporting to the Court, Probation, VJO, and/or Veteran Peer Mentor
- Reinstatement of liberties such as removal of curfew, removal from electronic monitoring, permission to work or attend outside activities, etc.
- Decreased contact with treatment as approved by treatment team
- Symbols of accomplishment: phased dog tags—Honor, Courage, Commitment
- Notification of progress towards graduation and early termination of supervision and sentence

## Sanctions and Removal from Court

Escalating sanctions may be imposed on any Veteran who is not compliant with the rules and expectations of the Court. Sanctions are intended to assist and support the Veteran to move towards success in the Court. Sanctions may include:

- Increased reporting to the Court
- Increased reporting to probation and/or increased drug testing
- Increased reporting to VJO, JRS specialist, and/or Veteran Peer Mentor
- Increased treatment requirements
- Mandated inpatient treatment
- Initiation of curfew/loss of liberties
- Placement on house arrest/electronic monitoring (EM) or EM with alcohol detection (EM/TAD)
- Incarceration—Veteran is remanded to incarceration for an unstated period of time—anywhere from several hours to several weeks
- Substantial and repeated non-compliance with the Court will result in Gagnon II hearing/resentencing and removal from the Court where Veteran's behaviors violated supervision and sentence requirements
- Veterans who are removed from Veterans Court for substantial and repeated non-compliance are generally denied readmission to the Court if the Veteran obtains new charges

## Referral Process

Veterans and their accompanying cases are given a great deal of consideration by the Veterans Court team in order to determine if the case or cases qualify and are appropriate for Veterans Court. For Veterans and cases deemed to be a good fit for the program, the case(s) will be transferred from your originally assigned courtroom to Veterans Court. Veterans Court team members are available to assist the Veteran in understanding the requirements and expectations of the program. Veterans are encouraged to voice questions or concerns to their VJO specialist, JRS representative, or counsel. For cases that are ineligible or not a good fit for Veterans Court, the Veteran's cases will be handled in the originally assigned courtroom. Your attorney and/or VJO specialist can help you understand that decision.

## Criminal Record

Cases generally enter Veterans Court by a general or negotiated plea. The Veterans Court plea results in a conviction which remains on a Veteran's record the same as any other criminal court conviction. For certain Veterans Court referred cases, the District Attorney's Office offers the Accelerated Rehabilitative Disposition program (ARD) for qualified first-time offenders. Successful completion of both the ARD program and Veterans Court supervision will result in expungement of the Veteran's criminal record.

## VA Pittsburgh Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) Program

Veterans are assigned a VJO specialist to assist in connecting the Veteran with appropriate services, treatment, and treatment providers. The VJO specialist develops an individualized service plan to meet the Veteran's specific treatment needs. This service plan outlines the treatment expectations for the Veteran while in the Veterans Court program. The VJO specialist will maintain close contact with other members of the Veterans Court team and will provide a review to the Court and to the team during each review hearing. The VJO specialist makes a recommendation to the Court as to whether the Veteran's review will be characterized as positive, neutral, or negative, based on the Veteran's compliance with the service plan expectations.



## Probation Supervision

Allegheny County Probation has a team of specially trained POs who supervise Veterans Court participants. A dedicated PO is present at all court hearings to provide detailed information on each Veteran's progress and compliance, as well as to make recommendations regarding Veterans Court supervision.

## Service Plan

All Veterans Court participants are required to sign and comply with a service plan. Your service plan is a condition of your probation. It is a written contract between the Veteran and the Court which details many aspects of treatment and supervision. The VA, and for some cases, JRS, is responsible for designing an appropriate service plan, as well as initiating any subsequent modifications as required. Service plans are tailored specifically to address each Veteran's needs and requirements. Service plans address issues such as where a Veteran will attend treatment and where they will reside.

The service plan also consists of additional standard requirements which include, but are not limited to, taking all prescribed medication(s) as directed, staying in contact with probation, VJO/or JRS, and your Veteran Peer Mentor, as well as attending other required programs.

Additionally, the Court may order you to comply with orders that are not written in your service plan if changes become necessary for your well-being and progress. Examples include working with a representative payee or additional service coordination. Probation and the VA or JRS may also place additional requirements on you. It is your responsibility to follow the service plan and any Court orders or other requirements. You are expected to contact the VA, Probation, or JRS for assistance if you run into any problems that cause difficulty following your service plan. Failure to follow the requirements of the Court and the service plan may result in negative consequences. Compliance with the service plan yields positive results and enables you to successfully complete the phases of your supervision and move forward to graduation.

## Progress Reviews and Phases

Unlike other court cases, you will be required to attend in-person reviews during your participation in Veterans Court. The purpose of the hearings is to monitor your progress in the Court. The Court conducts review hearings twice each month. Based on the totality of circumstances, and based on input from all team members, your progress

review will be classified as positive, negative, or neutral. Veterans who comply with the program and receive positive reviews will move through the phases of the Court towards graduation. Veterans who are doing poorly or are non-compliant with their plans may be ordered to report more frequently—to the Court, Probation, and VJO/JRS—until the Court determines compliance with the program has been restored and orders less frequent reporting.

Veterans Court has three separate phases: Honor, Courage, and Commitment. You will receive support and encouragement to help you succeed in complying with your program and phase requirements, and all conditions of your probation and individualized service plan. As you demonstrate success in each phase, you will be rewarded with reduced court reviews, less supervision restrictions, and receipt of a Veterans Court dog tag to mark your success in that phase.

- **HONOR:** Phase 1 will orient you to your treatment, the program, the Team, and the Court. You are expected to demonstrate understanding of your individualized service plan, expectations of the Court, and full compliance with all requirements. You will report to Court bi-monthly for no less than 5 reviews, and to probation, treatment, and other requested programs as frequently as directed
- **COURAGE:** Phase 2 of the Court is dedicated to you demonstrating consistency and reliability, while gaining insight into establishing new, appropriate responses to old behaviors. Your Court reviews will take place only once per month over the 4 months of this phase if you are fully compliant with the program. You will continue to report to probation, treatment, and other designated programs as frequently as directed
- **COMMITMENT:** Phase 3 of the Court represents your commitment to demonstrating increased independence, insight, responsibility, and personal growth in the months prior to completion of the program. You will report to the Court only once every other month if you are fully compliant with supervision. Other reporting requirements such as probation and VJO/JRS contact are generally stepped down as well

Veterans successfully completing all three program phases earn graduation and early termination of Court supervision and sentence. Veterans must continue to obey all rules and requirements of probation until the Veteran is notified that their case and probation supervision have been officially closed.

## Graduation

Veterans who have demonstrated progress and who have successfully completed all phases and conditions of Veterans Court, and no less than half of their Veterans Court sentence, are eligible to be considered for graduation. Approved graduates are eligible to receive early termination of sentence and supervision. Graduates are invited to be recognized at the annual Veterans Court graduation ceremony which celebrates each Veteran's accomplishments and successes in the Court.

Veterans Court has established a tradition of celebrating our Veterans accomplishments at an annual Veterans Court graduation ceremony held on the Thursday prior to Veterans Day in November of each year. Graduates are offered an opportunity to express their thoughts about their Veterans Court experience and successes. Graduation is celebrated with a formal and inspirational program attended by notable speakers, dignitaries, military guests, and Color Guard. Each graduate is given a military style "challenge coin" which carries special significance and meaning for military men and women and identifies the Veteran's substantial accomplishment in successfully completing the Veterans Court program.

## Exit Interview

Veterans will be required to participate in an exit interview upon completion or closing from the program. This allows for a final evaluation and dialogue with each Veteran and provides Veterans Court with the opportunity to gain feedback about the program to better serve our Veterans in the future. This is a time for the Veteran to reflect on their time in Veterans Court. The Veteran's continuing need for assistance with mental health treatment, housing support, disability assistance, substance abuse treatment, and other services will be evaluated to ensure the Veteran continues to have the tools needed to be successful and independent after leaving the Court. The exit interview allows the interviewer to assess a Veteran's personal understanding regarding a successful transition from the program after graduation, and how the Veteran can continue to achieve his/her goals. The exit interview also provides the Court with a better understanding of the Veteran's experience, so that the Court may continue to provide the best possible treatment and support to future Veterans.

## Confidentiality and Ethics

To participate in treatment court, each Veteran is required to complete a Release of Information (ROI) at referral. Participation in the Court will require subsequent ROIs, when requested for treatment programs, medical and clinical providers, and other appropriate entities. The ROI authorizes the Veterans Court Judge, staff, Team, and attorneys to receive all relevant past, present, and future medical, clinical, health, and other information relevant to treatment court participation. These informed consents allow sharing of information necessary to monitor treatment progress and compliance, and assists the Court in approving appropriate supervision and treatment recommendations consistent with each Veteran's current needs. During the period of Court supervision, the Veteran will be required to sign more than one ROI, for example, for each separate treatment program, medical or clinical providers, and other relevant entities. These signed ROIs are mandatory to the functioning of the court and the ability to properly assist the Veteran.

Maintaining confidentiality of the Veteran's protected personal information is of the highest concern to the Court, and the use and dissemination of such information is governed by both Federal and State law. Personal health information and confidential personal identifiers are never publicly revealed in open court. Participation in Veterans Court is conditioned on the Veteran signing the consents. The Veteran retains the authority to revoke consent in writing (except as already relied upon), but the consequence of an ROI revocation or refusal will trigger sanctions up to and including removal from Court.

## Summary

Since its inception in 2009, the Allegheny County Veterans Court has provided assistance and services to a growing number of Veterans. The Court continues to expand and explore more effective ways to better serve the Veteran population.

The Allegheny County Veterans Court team is honored to serve you during your time in this program. The team is encouraged by the ever-growing success of the Veterans in re-establishing their lives.

**We serve you because you served us.**

## VA PITTSBURGH HEALTHCARE SYSTEM PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES

Admissions	412-360-6162
Adult Day Health Care	412-822-2080
After Hours Nurse Helpline	1-888-558-3812
Audiology & Speech Pathology	412-360-6400
Behavioral Health	412-360-6600
Billing	412-360-3238
Caregiver Support Coordinator	412-822-2364 or 412-735-4610
Center for Treatment of Addictive Disorders	Residential program 412-360-6611 Outpatient program 412-360-6092
DAV Van	412-360-6957
Dental Clinic	412-822-2130
Domiciliary	412-822-1326 or 412-822-1329
Eligibility	412-360-6993
Ear Nose and Throat	412-360-6208
Eye Clinic	412-360-6207
Fee Basis	412-822-1227
Healthy Women's Center - Mammograms	412-360-1854
Heroes Hall	412-360-1117
Lost and Found	412-360-6273
Means Test	412-360-6263
Medical Specialty – Rainbow Clinic	412-360-6242
My HealtheVet	412-360-6838
Neurology	412-360-6185
Orthopedics	412-360-6306
Pain Clinic	412-360-6152
Patient Advocate	412-360-3614
Pharmacy	412-360-6210 (UD) 412-822-3140 (HZ)
Physical Therapy	412-822-2111
Podiatry	412-360-6795
Police	412-360-6911
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Clinic	412-360-6600
24-Hour Prescription Refill	412-822-3140

Prosthetics	412-822-2110
Radiology Scheduling	412-360-3168
Radiology/Imaging	412-360-6216
Registry Exam Scheduling	412-822-1139
Release of Information	412-360-3637 (UD) 412-822-1135 (HZ)
Same Day Surgery	412-360-6211
Surgical Clinics	412-360-6306
TDD/TT	412-360-6187
Transportation	412-360-3620
Tri-Care	412-360-6579
Urology	412-360-6209
Vascular Clinic	412-360-6306
Veterans Crisis Line	1-800-273-8255
Voluntary Services	412-822-3096 (HZ) 412-360-6220 (UD)

## ADDITIONAL VA PROGRAMS

### Behavioral Health

412-360-6600

There are a variety of services available at VAPHS to promote healthy adjustment throughout the lives of our Veterans, including:

- Individual Therapy
- Group Therapy
- Walk-in services
- Suicide Prevention Program 412-360-6515
- Intense Outpatient Program (IOP)
- Tobacco Cessation services

### Substance Abuse Services

Center for Treatment of Addictive Disorders (CTAD)

Outpatient Services 412-360-6611 or 412-360-6692

Residential Services 412-360-6611

Opioid Substitution Therapy Clinic 412-360-6611 or 412-360-6692

Substance Abuse Action Team

(please talk to your primary care provider about a referral)

Opioid Renewal Clinic (please talk to your primary care provider about a referral)

## **Military Sexual Trauma 412-360-1040**

Military Sexual Trauma (MST) is the term the Department of Veterans Affairs uses to refer to sexual assault or repeated, threatening sexual harassment that occurred while the Veteran was serving. It includes any sexual activity where someone is involved against his or her will – he or she may have been pressured into sexual activities (for example, with threats of negative consequences for refusing to be sexually cooperative or with implied faster promotions or better treatment in exchange for sex), may have been unable to consent to sexual activities (for example, when intoxicated) or may have been physically forced into sexual activities. Other experiences that fall into the category of MST include unwanted sexual touching or grabbing, threatening, offensive remarks about a

person’s body or sexual activities, and threatening or unwelcome sexual advances.

Both women and men can experience MST during their service. All Veterans seen at VA facilities are asked about experiences of sexual trauma because any type of trauma can affect a person’s physical and mental health, even years later. People can recover from trauma, and VA has free services to help Veterans do so. You do not need to have a VA disability rating (be “service-connected”) to receive these services and may be able to receive services even if you are not eligible for other VA care. You do not need to have reported the incident(s) when they happened or have documentation that they occurred.

## **The Healthcare for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) Program**

National Call Center for Homeless Veterans 1-877-424-3838

### **VAPHS HCHV Program 412-822-1272**

The Department of Veterans Affairs believes that no Veteran should ever be homeless, and VAPHS is committed to helping Veterans find their way to safe, stable housing.

In an effort to end homelessness among Veterans, we provide health care and supportive services to local homeless Veterans or Veterans at risk of becoming homeless. We offer a wide range of resources, including transitional and permanent housing, case management, medical care and other supportive services that aim to meet you where you are — and guide you to where you want to be. Veterans are engaged in treatment

programs that enable them to develop skills to live independently and achieve a better quality of life. When you enter our programs, our specially trained staff will guide you through each step, providing personalized case management that caters to your needs. Housing resources include two year transitional programs of Grant and Per Diem and Supportive Housing programs. HUD VASH is a voucher program offering permanent housing for homeless Veterans and their families.

Healthcare for Re-entry Veterans (HCRV)  
412-822-1275

## Women Veterans Healthcare Program

412-360-1854/6289

To serve this rapidly growing population, the Healthy Women's Center operates to assist with female Veterans' complete health care needs. In addition to providing primary care services, such as offering treatment for high blood pressure, diabetes and arthritis, the Healthy Women's Center also supports a

full range of female-specific services. (If you are a female Veteran currently taking narcotics, and you find out you are pregnant, please do NOT abruptly stop taking your medications before speaking with your provider. Call your provider immediately).

## Vocational Services Program

If you are in need of employment or vocational assistance, please call 412-822-1286 or 412-822-1287 to get involved with the VAPHS Vocational Rehabilitation Program.

## FILING CLAIMS

Do you have injuries or illnesses that you feel are related to your time in service?

If so, you may want to file claims for these issues through the Veterans Benefits Administration/VA Regional Office. When individuals are granted service connection for an injury or illness there are some benefits that come along with it. By being service connected, a Veteran will receive VA treatment for this issue as long as he/she remains service connected. Additionally, if a Veteran is rated at 10% or above, he/she will receive financial compensation for this issue. There are several options for getting assistance with filing a claim. A representative or service officer will assist you in gathering necessary supporting documentation to file your claim. Once the claim has been submitted, it will be reviewed. You will receive notification when you need to present to a VA facility for a compensation and pension exam.

After your compensation and pension exam is completed, the reports will be submitted to the VA regional office, and your claim will continue through the review process. Once a rating decision is made on your claim, you will be notified whether the claim was approved or denied. If approved, you will be told what percentage the service-related issue is rated. Keep in mind, the claims process tends to be very lengthy. During this process, should you have any questions, please call the VA Regional Office Call Center to check the status of your claim at **1-800-827-1000**, or you can check in with your representative or service officer, and they may assist you in checking on the status of your claim. You can also check the status of your claim online by enrolling for an eBenefits account (see page 27 for more information).



**VA Regional Office**

Federal Building 1000 Liberty Ave. Pittsburgh, PA 15222 1-800-827-1000  
[www.ebenefits.va.gov](http://www.ebenefits.va.gov)

**Veterans/National Service Organizations (VSO/NSO)**

(All are located at the Federal Building.)

PA Dept. of Military and Veterans Affairs: 412-395-6264

Adjutant General's Office: 412-395-6225

American Legion: 412-395-6230

American Veterans (AMVETS): 412-395-6248

Disabled American Veterans (DAV): 412-395-6241

Military Order of the Purple Heart: 412-395-6250

Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA): 412-395-6254

Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW): 412-395-6260

West Virginia Veterans: 412-395-6262

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