

NVTI Podcast Series

Continuing Conversations: Serving Justice-Involved Veterans

Intro: Welcome to the National Veterans' Training Institute podcast series, where we discuss pressing issues affecting today's veterans.

Host: Welcome to today's NVTI podcast, Continuing Conversations: Serving Justice-Involved Veterans. I'm your host, Hannah, and we have another wonderful panel with us today. To kick things off, could each of you take a moment to introduce yourselves? Just tell us where you're from, a little bit about your role, and how you serve justice-involved veterans. Ellie, can I get you to go first?

Ellie: Sure, Hannah, thank you. My name is Ellie Morales. I'm an Assistant Clinical Professor of Law and Director of the Veterans Legal Clinic at Wake Forest University School of Law. In the clinic, we represent former service members before the Department of Defense administrative records correction boards and before the Department of Veterans Affairs for people who have been unfairly discharged and received less than honorable discharges due to racial discrimination, discrimination based on sexual orientation, or a lack of understanding of how mental health affects one's behavior. Because of this discrimination, these service members do not have veteran status under federal law. And so, in the clinic, the students represent these service members pro bono, or for free, under my supervision as the licensed attorney, and remedy these injustices through our written and oral advocacy assisting them in obtaining veteran status.

Sean: My name is Sean Clark. I'm the National Director for Veterans Justice Programs (VJP) in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, or VA. The Veterans Justice Programs include Healthcare for Reentry Veterans, which provides outreach and linkage to VA services for veterans as they're reentering their communities after long-term incarceration in state or federal prisons. The other program in VJP is Veterans Justice Outreach, or VJO, and VJO serves veterans who are involved at the front end of the criminal justice system. So, think police, court, and jails. Put together, these two programs are a prevention-oriented component of VA's work to prevent and end homelessness among veterans, and they target the close relationship between incarceration and homelessness. Their work also includes facilitating veterans' access to legal services, including by supporting the growing number of free legal clinics operating in VA facilities, which we're very excited about. Personally, I joined the VA back in 2007 as a Presidential Management Fellow. Since then, I spent a little bit of

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time also serving as a Special Assistant U.S. Attorney in Washington, DC, and way back when I earned a JD from William and Mary School of Law.

Scott: Hi Hannah. My name is Scott Tirocchi. I'm the Division Director of Justice for Vets, one of four divisions within All Rise. Justice for Vets transforms the way the justice system identifies, assesses, and treats our veterans by ensuring that no veteran is left behind. We provide training and technical assistance to help communities bring together local, state, and federal resources to directly serve veterans involved in the criminal justice system due to substance use and mental health disorders. In doing so, we keep veterans out of jail and prison and connect them to the benefits and treatments they have earned, all while saving tax dollars.

Host: This is a wonderful group as I said. So, so happy that you were able to join us today, and before we really dive into this podcast, I think it's worth noting that the definition of a veteran may vary from program to program. So, we need to get that out on the table first, of course.

For the Jobs for Veterans State Grants, or JVSG, programs, an eligible veteran is defined as someone who meets one of the following criteria. Now, keep in mind that the eligible veteran definition for JVSG is more stringent than veteran criteria, all eligible veterans are veterans, but not all veterans are eligible veterans for JVSG. So, let's listen to the four eligibility criteria

- Served on active duty for a period of more than 180 days and was discharged or released with an other than dishonorable discharge
- Was discharged or released from active duty because of a service-connected disability
- Was a member of a reserve component under an order to active duty pursuant to content in United States Code who served on active duty during a period of war or in a campaign or expedition for which a campaign badge is authorized and was discharged or released from such duty with other than a dishonorable discharge, and finally
- Was discharged or released from active duty by reason of sole survivorship discharge.

There are additional details on these eligibility criteria in the most recent Veterans' Program Letter, or VPL, number 05-24.

So that's the JVSG program. For the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program, or HVRP, a veteran is defined as one

- Who received a discharge or release under conditions other than dishonorable, and

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- At least one day of active duty to include time spent in basic training for active-duty members, or
- Federal active duty for National Guard or Reserve members (not including inactive duty and active duty for training), or
- Any period of inactive duty or active duty for training during which National Guard and Reserve members received a service-connected disability resulting from a disease or injury incurred or aggravated in the line of duty.

So that's JVSG criteria for eligible veteran, and then I just did the HVRP criteria for a definition of a veteran. Keep in mind other programs and agencies may also define veteran differently. Therefore, it is very important to determine each program's definition of a veteran and its eligibility criteria. You can learn more about eligibility, for instance, for VA Healthcare and other agency services by visiting the links in this podcast's resource guide.

Now that we've level set just a little bit, let's talk. I did recently come across a report from the Council on Criminal Justice, and I got to tell you, it really did give me pause. It said that 1/3 of veterans self-report being involved in the justice system, compared to 1/5 of non-veterans. Now I have to admit that I was taken back by that difference. Will you explain some unique risk factors for veterans for us, please?

Scott: Well, here is another risk factor that oftentimes gets missed. It's a major piece of the puzzle that often gets overlooked. It is acquired brain injury, whether it be traumatic, like blunt force trauma, or nontraumatic, which we will see with someone that has been deprived of oxygen. The individual may present in a manner that can mimic, and oftentimes be confused with, the behaviors that are associated with criminalistic thinking or personality. For example, individuals with mild or moderate acquired brain injury may appear oppositional, easily angered, agitated, and impulsive. They may fail to keep appointments with probation officers, pretrial services officers, or treatment providers. The justice system may misinterpret all of this as being criminalistic. They are not. These individuals are exhibiting potential signs that we see with someone who has incurred a head trauma.

Host: Oh wow, that does seem like it could be a very big risk factor. What are some factors that can help prevent justice involvement?

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Sean: These we refer to as protective factors and a couple of protective factors that can help prevent justice involvement include access to health care and a sense of connectedness or belonging for the veteran.

Host: Well, preventing justice involvement is always going to be the goal. But for those who have already interacted with the justice system, how do the paths to treatment differ depending on the stage of justice involvement? And by that I mean whether it's at the point of arrest, during probation, or while in jail or prison?

Sean: So, specialists with the Veterans Justice Programs conduct outreach to veterans at every stage of the criminal justice process, and that includes by conducting training for local law enforcement agencies, visiting local jails, and state and federal prisons to conduct outreach there, as well as serving as members of Veterans Treatment Court teams. But regardless of where a specialist encounters a justice-involved veteran, the intent of this work is the same, and that's to facilitate access to VA care at the earliest possible point. The details of that work can look really different depending on the setting where it's happening. So, for example, whether that's a courtroom as opposed to a state prison, or even two jails that are in neighboring counties where things can work very differently. But the basic purpose, again, is always to help a veteran get from point A to point B. Where B is the treatment and the other supports that that individual needs.

Scott: Treatment courts typically are involved in Intercepts 2 and 3 of the Sequential Intercept Model, as designed by Policy Research Associates. We see a bit of mixture depending upon the region or the jurisdiction of when court personnel become involved with identifying and assessing the potential treatment court participant. Oftentimes, program personnel will receive direct calls from sheriffs who have identified veterans in lock up. Program staff will then typically request assistance from their fellow peer on the team, the Veterans Justice Outreach specialists, the VA liaison, to help them explore getting this potential candidate into the program, or if not eligible for the program, VA services upon release from incarceration.

Host: I'm really glad you mentioned the Sequential Intercept Model. Let's make sure to level set so everyone knows what we're talking about. Would you explain that a bit more? What types of interventions are outlined by the Veterans Sequential Intercept Model or V-SIM? And how does it help justice-involved veterans?

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Sean: Sure. The Sequential Intercept Model is a tool that's developed and used by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, or SAMHSA, and it's used widely elsewhere as well. But it helps communities identify resources and gaps in services at each intercept or phase of the criminal justice system. And it helps them develop local strategic action plans to respond to those. So, VA worked with partners at the Justice Involved Veterans Network, which is run by the National Institute of Corrections at DOJ, in order to create a veteran-specific application of the Sequential Intercept Model. Our contributions were outlining VA healthcare and VJO and HCRV resources as they apply to each intercept and again VJP specialists provide services to veterans at every intercept that's mapped into Sequential Intercept Model. And the way to think about that is that VJO is operating at the front end or the early stages, so police, courts and jails, and HCRV is working with veterans at what we refer to as the back end, state and federal prisons and the process of reentry back to the community from those facilities.

Scott: Right. As I previously stated, VTC programs are usually involved in Intercepts 2, initial detention and court hearings, and 3, jails and courts. VTCs want to ensure the veteran receives the healthcare they have earned regardless of whether they are accepted into program or not. And so, they often work to connect them, and justice professionals involved with working with them, with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Host: Great. Thank you so much. It's also important to recognize that these paths differ according to whether their misconduct occurred during their military service or after their service has ended. Ellie, I know you have some thoughts on this. Would you please share?

Ellie: Yes, Hannah, you are exactly right. The paths do differ according to whether the misconduct occurred during service or after military service has ended. So, in terms of access to care, those who become justice-involved after they leave service are exponentially better off than those who become justice-involved during service. If the service member leaves the military with an honorable or general under honorable conditions discharge, then a plethora of VA benefits are typically available to assist that service member. So, for example, if a service member is deployed, then their mental health care is likely covered, and if they have a condition that is service-connected, then their healthcare will also be covered. But even if none of the circumstances apply that I just mentioned, the service member with an honorable or general discharge still may receive care as a non-service-connected veteran. So, the bottom line is that

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if the justice involvement comes after service, the odds are greater that the veteran will be able to get treatment at the VA. However, if the service member is justice-involved during service, then the chances of receiving care are much less, even if the misconduct itself was related to a medical reason. For example, abusing drugs because the service member is self-medicating and they are suffering from undiagnosed PTSD could prevent them from getting care at the VA after service. So even if the misconduct is related to a military-induced condition, if the service member has the misfortune of committing the misconduct during service, the chances of treatment at the VA go way down. The military will often punish that misconduct, resulting in an other than honorable, or worse, discharge. That will likely limit access to medical care at the VA and this is why it matters when the justice-involved behavior occurs and important to understand how it can impact the service members' ability to access the healthcare and other benefits.

Thanks, Hannah.

Host: Thank you. That was a great answer and very important. We know ultimately successful reintegration into society is the goal. How does the experience of incarceration affect veterans' reintegration into society differently from veterans who have not been incarcerated, and as we talk about this, what specialized support is available?

Scott: Hannah, incarceration definitely affects veterans. I was employed for 11 years as a counselor in both the jail and prison settings. My impression remains that there was a significant amount of regret, shame, and guilt with the individuals that I worked with. When individuals are released from incarceration, I can only imagine that there must be a tremendous sense of separation and isolation from their community. They must feel very much alone, and this can only be compounded by their veteran status. Since we know only a very small percentage of the entire population wears the uniform it's actually less than 1% it's .55%. So, depending upon the discharge services provided upon release, they can range from very few in many communities to robust in others, the individuals the chance of recidivating will be impacted based upon the quality and quantity of these services.

Sean: Well, first we know that incarceration as an adult male is the single highest risk factor for ever becoming homeless, and VA remains committed to ending homelessness for veterans. So, our specialists help connect veterans to VA and community housing solutions that can both prevent homelessness and resolve it where it's already occurred. Most of the veterans who we see in VJP have a mental health disorder diagnosis. About 2/3 of them have one of those or a

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substance use disorder diagnosis. Almost half of the veterans we see have one of those, and over 40% of the veterans we serve have both diagnoses, or in the clinical term, are dually diagnosed. Those are very high numbers relative to the general population and the rates at which they experience those conditions. Troublingly, justice-involved veterans are three times more likely to have attempted suicide in their lifetimes, compared to veterans who are not justice involved. VJP specialists help connect veterans to the full range of services that can respond to these needs, including mental health and substance use disorder services and others besides those. Also, as struggles at work can be a real risk factor for future criminal justice engagement, focused employment services alongside traditional treatment can be really important in improving reintegration and reducing risks for future criminal justice engagement, and VA offers those employment services as well.

Host: Although we've touched on this already, I do think it's important to discuss in more depth and so I want to go back to a conversation that we were having with Ellie just recently around how their discharge affects the services a veteran is eligible for. We know it matters. We've heard that when a service member commits the misconduct, whether it's during service or after discharge, that matters in terms of eligibility for benefits at the VA and other agencies. So, this is important for us to drill down on a little bit more and something I want to briefly return to. So, Ellie if we can hear a little bit more from you on this, that would be great.

Ellie: Sure, Hannah. So, discharge status and the reason for the discharge both directly impact eligibility for benefits at the VA. An other than honorable, bad conduct or dishonorable discharge, or dismissal for officers will likely limit access to VA benefits. So, while theoretically some people with an other than honorable or worse discharge are entitled to full or partial benefits, the process of interpreting the nature of one's discharge is incredibly complex, and studies conducted by Harvard University entitled, *Underserved* in 2016, *Turned Away* in 2020, as well as extensive experience from both my position as the Wake Forest Veterans Legal Clinic director, and from my colleague at UNC law, have shown that the VA's inability to properly adjudicate these benefits, which results in the service members with other than honorable, or worse, discharges not receiving benefits unless they have legal counsel. And the main reason for this is that VA adjudicators who largely have no medical or legal training, are expected to make complex legal and medical analyses and conclusions. So just to illustrate this, I'll give you an analogy. It is akin to asking a nurse in a dermatology office to perform open heart surgery. The nurse is in the medical field, but no one would reasonably

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make such a request. And so, in the VA context of a character of discharge decision, that is why mistakes are almost inevitable. To be clear, the VA employees are acting in good faith, and it is in no way their fault whatsoever that they are being put in this very difficult position. But this is why, in part, some people who have an other than honorable, or worse, discharge, have little hope for ever getting any benefits at the VA without counsel.

Scott: At Justice for Vets, we encourage all VTC programs to connect their participants with VA services as soon as possible. When we are providing training workshops to new or existing court programs, we will always stress the importance of immediate identification, immediate assessment, and immediate treatment response. The VA across the country does a wonderful job at this. For participants ineligible for VA services, we encourage ongoing training and support for community practitioners working with these individuals. We encourage these communities and practitioners working within these communities to strive for service delivery that is equivalent to or exceeds the standards of care.

Sean: Eligibility for VA Healthcare is outlined on our public-facing website, and we'll include that link in the materials. Our message is to really encourage all former service members to apply for VA healthcare if they're interested in accessing VA services. VJP specialists can assist justice-involved veterans in navigating the enrollment and eligibility processes at their local VA Medical Center, and they do that all the time. Veterans with other than honorable discharges may not be eligible for the full medical benefits package, but they may be eligible for housing and mental health services. And it's important to keep in mind that these criteria do evolve over time, so we strongly encourage all interested former service members to apply for VA healthcare, regardless of what they've been told in the past about their eligibility status. Again, eligibility criteria have opened up considerably in the past few years, and a veteran who may have been unable to access VA healthcare in the past can find that it's a different story now as a result of these changes.

Host: Thank you. How can support services and systems adjust to meet the varied needs of the justice-involved veteran population? From an employment perspective, how different might the needs look for justice-involved veterans?

Scott: Having or encouraging the adoption of assessments that are indeed veteran-centric is critical. It's important we find out who they were while they were serving in the military. What was their rating, their occupational specialty? How can those skills

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transfer now? What does the state offer for reciprocity, especially when it comes to licensing? Where is the veteran now in relation to educational, vocational, or general employment opportunities? If employment is not a consideration, what about volunteerism or what we call give back? What can the service provider offer in this vital area of one's overall wellness, and how do supportive services and systems empower the justice-involved veteran to restore their sense of purpose?

Sean: Whether it's employment, housing or treatment services, stigma remains a significant hurdle for veterans who've experienced engagement with the criminal justice system. Providers who work with this population in any capacity should really be careful to examine policies, procedures, and especially subjective acceptance criteria. To ensure that those aren't influenced by factors that could stigmatize veterans who've interacted with the criminal justice system. Also invaluable to use motivational interviewing skills to assess veteran's readiness for change and help them move toward their goals. A good example here is compliance with probation requirements that are that are imposed through Veterans Treatment Court. There may be times where a veteran may not have sought substance use disorder treatment in the past but is now willing to as a result of this justice involvement and as a condition imposed by probation. It's important not to think of this as only doing treatment to stay out of trouble or seeing that as some lesser form of motivation or less worthy reason for seeking care. A service provider can use a goal that is expressed as and held as staying out of trouble to help a veteran in meaningful ways. It can reduce the harm caused by substance use. It can help them realize a period of sobriety or recovery that they may not have otherwise experienced. It can be a window onto that opportunity, an employment service provider also can use that as motivation to help a veteran consider an employment opportunity that they may not have otherwise considered. And again, I think the key thing to remember here is that staying out of trouble can be a great motivator for meaningful change and not some lesser form of motivation compared to others.

Host: Thank you all and as a reminder, the resources that we talk about in this podcast will be in an attached resource guide. Now we've been discussing programs that assist veterans after justice involvement because that's really the focus of this podcast. But I don't want to lose the existence of outreach initiatives aimed at preventing justice involvement among veterans. If you would, let's spend just a little time focusing on that topic.

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Sean: Absolutely. So, in the justice programs, we believe that by helping veterans connect to resources like stable housing, employment services, and substance use disorder services, we're helping them reduce the risk of future engagement with the criminal justice system. And we're hopeful that outreach and collaborative work with our partners in law enforcement, other first responders, and especially through deflection programs, will further that goal as well.

Historically, in VJP, we've had robust outreach to veterans in court, jail, and prison settings, but less so for veterans who are initially encountering law enforcement or fire department, EMS, other first responders in their communities. Last year, VA started positioning its medical centers across the country to partner more effectively with community-led deflection and pre-arrest diversion initiatives, to help build out those initiatives' capacity to help veterans, in particular, access needed care. This work is increasingly being referred to as veterans' deflection, and we're seeing that grow in uptake across the country. Deflection as a concept is defined by the Police, Treatment, and Community, Collaborative, or PTACC, as an early upstream preventative approach to substance use and mental health that offers pathways for a community-based response to occur before an event, such as an overdose, arrest, or a mental health crisis. In other words, getting ahead of the crisis with an intervention in a linkage to services as appropriate. This work is centered in community and guided by treatment and health, and deflection is a true, shared public safety and public health approach, with the potential to reduce crime while promoting well-being. For law enforcement in particular, deflection creates a new third option for addressing substance use disorder, homelessness, and mental health conditions, and while in the past, officers were only able to arrest or potentially take no action, deflection programs, again, give them that third option, and by serving as a conduit to treatment and services effort for the outcome of any given encounter. Veterans' deflection presents the opportunity to create veteran-specific deflection interventions and ensure that new and existing deflection programs are screening every adult they encounter to determine veteran status, that they're actively engaged with local VA partners, and that they can provide a warm handoff into VA care for veterans who are eligible and want to seek VA services. Deflection programs, veteran-focused and otherwise, are typically led by community law enforcement agencies or other first responders, and they work in partnership with a wide array of service providers in their communities. These programs reflect the communities that choose to start them, and there's considerable variation among the programs in both participant eligibility criteria and operational process.

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Scott: I will absolutely reflect what Sean said about deflection and add that deflection is still relatively new concept regarding effective implementation. However, it is another tool for our consideration in our toolkit as we strive to see some of our sisters and brothers live law-abiding lifestyles. At Justice for Vets, we are always looking forward to seeing the new research that's coming out on this topic and exploring its relationship with the Sequential Intercept Model.

Host: That's fantastic. Thank you. We know that community-based support is critical, and I know that we're all hopeful that the concept of deflection before an event such as a overdose, arrest, or mental health crisis, will reap many rewards. Justice-involved veterans, we know have specific needs; basic needs such as food, housing, and transportation, as well as more advanced needs such as legal representation for correcting or upgrading discharges. How can veteran service providers connect with the resources needed to provide comprehensive support to these veterans?

Sean: Veterans Justice Program specialists can help justice-involved veterans connect to a wide array of services. So, with regard to legal assistance, we really encourage veterans and community partners to visit our Legal Services for Veterans, or LSV, public-facing website. The URL for that site can be found in the resource guide that accompanies this podcast, so we really encourage you to check that out. There, you'll find a list of VA-affiliated legal clinics. So, these are free legal clinics that we host at VA facilities, medical centers, outpatient clinics, vet centers, as well as LSV, again, that's Legal Services for Veterans grantees, so organizations that VA funds to provide legal services. These partners all provide different types of legal support, and some have different eligibility criteria, so it's important to reach out to a provider who's listed for your area to learn more about the services they provide, their eligibility criteria, and other details. These services can include discharge upgrades and assistance in accessing services such as food stamps, so again, important to reach out and find out specifically what's available in your area and what the criteria for those services are.

Host: We also know that access to education and skill development is critical for justice-involved veterans. What are some effective ways to provide these opportunities?

Sean: When veterans engage with the VA, there are a number of supports available for pursuing education, technical training, and employment opportunities. The best known on the education front is, of course, the GI Bill but there are other programs like Veteran Readiness and Employment, formerly known as Vocational Rehabilitation and

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Employment, and Compensated Work Therapy, which supports veterans who are in VA healthcare as they prepare for competitive employment in the community.

Host: Earlier, Sean mentioned connectedness as being a protective factor that can prevent veteran justice involvement. I would think connectedness and a sense of community could also help justice-involved veterans. Let's talk about the role of peer support and community engagement in supporting justice-involved veterans. What are some examples of successful initiatives or programs?

Scott: Veterans Treatment Courts have mentors, those with history of military service. They also have VA peer support specialists and community peer recovery support specialists. We are seeing that all of these individuals play a significant role in the recovery process.

Sean: Well, as Scott mentioned, peer support through peer specialists can be found across many different settings in VA healthcare, and that includes the Veterans Justice Programs. Peer specialists serve as role models for veterans who face challenges similar to those that the peer specialists themselves have faced in the past, and they can inspire hope, provide support to navigate the process of reentering from jail or prison, or getting through the Veterans Treatment Court experience. A couple of pilot programs in VA that currently utilize peer specialists' expertise, our Post-incarceration engagement, or PIE, that's P-I-E, and that's a modified critical time intervention peer model focused on veterans who are exiting prison. And there's also Mission Criminal Justice, or Mission CJ, which is a modified forensic intensive case management model, and that pairs a licensed clinician and a peer specialist serving veterans with serious mental illness diagnoses and substance use disorder diagnoses who are participating in Veterans Treatment Courts.

Host: Based on your experience working with justice-involved veterans, what might employers and other community members do to best support these veterans?

Sean: I would say provide opportunities for meaningful employment and reintegration into the community. Veterans can find themselves engaged with the criminal justice system for many reasons, and that experience can be very destabilizing. Meaningful employment provides the opportunity for a successful integration or reintegration into the veterans' community, and it can be a vital support alongside of veterans' other recovery, health promoting behaviors, engagement with care, other forms of support.

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Host: In your opinion, what policy changes or advocacy efforts do you feel are needed to better support justice-involved veterans, particularly in areas like housing, healthcare and employment?

Ellie: So, my focus has been on eligibility for VA benefits. So, the policy change I would make is to eliminate all regulatory bars to VA benefits. So let me give you some background to explain what I mean by this. Generally, there are two ways to be barred from benefits at the VA. One way is through Congress. Congress passed a statute that, in very specific situations, like a punitive discharge at a General Court-martial or a discharge for desertion, for example, will bar the service member from all benefits for that period of service. These are statutory bars to benefits. That is not what I'm talking about getting rid of. The second way to be barred from some or all VA benefits is through the VA rules, or the regulatory bars. This is for much more minor misconduct like drug use or short-term AWOLs. Congress did not create these additional bars to benefits, the VA did. In my opinion, these regulatory bars to benefits are preventing health care and treatment for those service members who need it the most. So, to illustrate the significance of the VA's regulatory bars, I will give you an example of how it works currently. When someone uses drugs, let's say in the Marine Corps, for example, even if they were self-medicating with marijuana because of military sexual trauma or combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder, the Marine Corps may discharge that Marine with an other than honorable, or worse, discharge, despite that mitigation evidence I just mentioned. If the Marine has multiple instances of drug use, then they will be barred by a VA regulatory bar from benefits, not a bar implemented by Congress. So again, that example is how it currently works. Eliminating the regulatory bars to VA benefits for those who have much more minor misconduct can lead to those service members not being denied healthcare and benefits when they leave the military. These former service members could leverage those benefits in their post-military life, which could prevent so many of the problems that we've discussed today, including homelessness, suicide, and becoming justice-involved after service because they will be getting treatment for those service-connected conditions. These VA benefits are truly lifesaving. Something noteworthy is that the VA actually just changed these regulatory barriers to benefits. They came out last week and will take effect in the coming months. So, my idea here with changing and actually and my idea is getting rid of the regulatory bars is not new. The VA has been looking at this for quite a while, so stay tuned on the new regulatory bars to benefits the VA has just pushed out.

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Sean: On the advocacy or the attitudinal front, I would say continued efforts to combat stigmatization of justice involvement and justice-involved veterans really is vital and I don't think we can overstress the importance of examining policies, procedures, criteria for acceptance. Especially those that have a subjective or discretionary element to ensure that they're not influenced by stigmatizing factors around interaction with the criminal justice system.

Host: Thank you all so much for participating today. This was such an important episode. I certainly hope that we'll be able to all talk again. Do you have any final thoughts to share with our audience today?

Scott: Hannah, I want to say thank you so much. It was an honor to be here today. Wonderful to be part of this panel discussion. The one or two themes that I would like to emphasize are the crucial role social connectedness plays in recovery and ensuring that we are empowering our justice-involved veterans to restore their sense of hope and purpose. And, of course, we do this by treating them and working with them holistically beyond their current criminal justice involvement. Thanks again, Hannah.

Ellie: Hannah, I'll just add too. Thank you for having me and highlighting these really important issues for our veteran community.

Sean: From the Veterans Justice Program's perspective, I would just repeat the earlier point that VA wants to serve veterans. If you're a veteran criminal justice-involved or not, we want to hear from you, and we want to help you access VA care. So again, regardless of what you may have heard in the past or understood in the past about your eligibility for VA healthcare and the other services that VA can provide, we would encourage you to apply because eligibility criteria have changed over time, and they continue to change. So please reach out and let us help you access the care and services that you've earned.

Host: Thank you to our panel for joining us for today's podcast and for sharing your expertise as well as your experiences to help veteran service providers better serve and support justice-involved veterans. To our listeners, if you would like more information about serving veterans, please visit [NVTI.org](https://nvti.org) to access resources like this podcast. We're constantly adding new materials, so check back often. We also, of course, invite you to continue the conversation at the Making Careers Happen for Veterans: Community of Practice. Thank you all so much.

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Outro: This podcast is brought to you by the National Veterans Training Institute, whose mission is to further develop and enhance the professional skills of veterans' employment and training service providers throughout the United States. This program is funded by the U.S .Department of Labor, Veterans' Employment and Training Service and administered by Management Concepts. For more episodes, visit the NVTI website at www.nvti.org.