

Driving Privilege Restoration Program
An Innovative Practice in VHA Homeless Program Operations

White Paper

VA



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INTRODUCTION

The VHA Homeless Programs Office identifies and disseminates innovative practices in homeless program operations. The Hershel “Woody” Williams VA Medical Center (HWWVAMC) in Huntington, W.Va. has been identified as a site with an innovative practice in helping Veterans overcome transportation barriers resulting from revoked driving privileges.

Prior research found that in 2012, 24% of Veterans contacted by VA’s Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) program had a current charge of driving under the influence (DUI)¹. When Veterans lack driver’s licenses or have other driving restrictions imposed upon them, they often experience other negative impacts, such as difficulty with attending medical appointments, accessing resources to address basic needs, or maintaining employment. These challenges are further exacerbated for justice-involved Veterans for whom a lack of transportation has even more serious consequences. These Veterans may be at risk of revocation of probation or parole, and even incarceration if they miss required treatment appointments, meetings with probation offices, or otherwise fail to appear in court. Beyond the personal costs of missed or canceled appointments, a 2017 study that found approximately 1.8 million VA appointments are canceled every year due to lack of transportation, with costs to the VA totaling \$4.4 billion².

Helping Veterans regain their driving privileges can be critical to their long-term success. Unfortunately, Veterans may often experience challenges when attempting to reinstate their licenses, such as difficulty understanding their original charges or the legal requirements for regaining a license, not having the funds to pay for fees, or frustration with navigating the local bureaucracies. Such was the case at the HWWVAMC when, in January 2021, VJO specialists were presented with requests from Veterans to assist with the completion of paperwork from the West Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles (WV DMV). These Veterans lost their licenses due to DUI convictions and were ordered by the WV DMV to complete therapy and DUI programming to regain their driving privileges. While VA clinicians could provide many of these services to the Veterans as part of their VA health care, many clinicians were reluctant to sign paperwork verifying completion over fears of liability and other policy barriers.

¹ [Structured Evidence Review to Identify Treatment Needs of Justice-Involved Veterans and Associated Psychological Interventions](#)

² (cited on VHA IE Trailblazers Blog dated 2021, July 27).



Undeterred, the VJO specialists at the HWWVAMC set out to partner with WV DMV to help work through these concerns and find solutions for these Veterans to regain their licenses.

PRACTICE OVERVIEW

The VJO specialists met with representatives from WV DMV in February 2021 to verify whether VA clinicians could, in principle, provide therapy and programming that would satisfy the state's requirements. Fortunately, this exploration was straightforward. As there were limited community-based services available to people seeking DUI hours, WV DMV welcomed the chance of adding VA to the pool of providers. Representatives from WV DMV emphasized their organization's flexibility with programming.

Next, with the understanding that VA could provide services that would satisfy WV DMV's requirements, the VJO specialists met with their homeless program substance use disorder and peer support specialists to develop DUI group therapy and psychoeducation sessions. These sessions would provide Veterans with 18 hours of required programming needed to reinstate their licenses. An evidence-based curriculum was identified ([Seeking Safety](#) and [SMART Recovery Life Skills Workbook](#)) and a course schedule was developed. As the COVID-19 national emergency was still active, and because COVID-19 vaccine access was just starting to ramp up, all sessions took place using telehealth solutions.

Once the curriculum was established, the VJO specialists then had to determine which VA staff could sign the relevant attestation forms. To get the answers they needed, they consulted with VA's Office of Regional Counsel as well as their facility's Mental Health leadership. It was determined that

Licensed Independent Practitioners (LIPs) could be permitted to sign WV DMV forms. Notably, both VA and WV agreed that VA staff signatures confirmed the Veteran's completion of the required hours but did not guarantee a Veteran's commitment to sobriety or future driving behavior.

"It is far better to provide tailored services on an individual basis with direct knowledge of the individual by certified and trained mental health experts than it is to give a large group of people on a video conference (or in person, for that matter) 18 hours to watch a clock tick by until the basic standard is met."

Travis Troutman
Safety & Treatment
Research Specialist
WV Division of Motor
Vehicles



With the major elements of their new program in place, the VJO specialists worked with their facility's homeless program staff to develop a referral and admissions process. It was decided that the VJO specialists would complete a brief assessment to determine their need and appropriateness for referral to the program. Upon referral, Veterans received an enrollment packet including a welcome letter explaining the program, workbooks, step-by-step guidelines for using telehealth, and a start date. Veterans signed a VA Form 10-5345, Request for and Authorization to Release Health Information to allow for communication with WV DMV staff. This was critical, as Veterans were frequently unclear about what specific requirements needed to be met to have their driving privileges reinstated. Lastly, when Veterans completed the program, VJO specialists helped the Veterans get the relevant forms signed and transmitted to WV DMV.

In March 2021, the first cohort of two Veterans was admitted and, by the end of July 2021, five Veterans had successfully completed the program. Inspired by the initial success, the HWWVAMC moved to offer five groups per week, including evening hours. **By June 2022, 64 Veterans had been referred, 30 had completed the program, and 12 had regained driving privileges.** In addition, an "aftercare" group was initiated for those who had completed the DUI program to provide ongoing support.

CONCLUSION

Based on feedback received from Veterans, VA staff, and WV DMV representatives, the impact of the DUI initiative has been universally positive. The VJO specialists at HWWVAMC note that some Veterans may need significant case management throughout the process, including assistance in resolving any fees or fines. The WV DMV found value in the partnership, as it helped them resolve the backlog that occurred when there were limited community-based programs offering DUI programs. Given the number of skilled clinicians, telehealth capability, and utilization of Veteran-centered, evidence-based practice, VA is well-equipped to provide DUI programming that helps Veterans drive again.

We would like to thank the dedicated staff at the Hershel "Woody" Williams VAMC Homeless Resource Center for sharing their practice with us. For more information, please contact HomelessVets@va.gov.

