

Veterans and Family Support Services Veterans First - Jail Diversion Program

Presbyterian Medical Services & UNM Center for Rural and Community Behavioral Health
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Background

Currently, there are nearly 180,000 veterans living in New Mexico, of whom approximately 135,000 are wartime veterans (NM Department of Veterans Services, 2007). According to 2007 data, there are 56,435 Hispanic and 9,554 Native American veterans in New Mexico (Department of Veterans Administration [VA], 2007). Roughly 15% of New Mexicans over the age of 18 are veterans. Approximately 15,000 New Mexican veterans have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan, and an estimated third of these (5,000) are suffering from PTSD. Between September 11, 2001 and June 15, 2007, 1,750 or 12% of the veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom entered into the New Mexico VA system, with many additional returning servicemen and women not enrolled in services or lacking ready access to military treatment facilities (NM Behavioral Health Planning Council [BHPC], 2007).

Many veterans who could benefit from mental health services do not qualify for VA health care or choose not to seek services (GAINS Center, 2008). Only 40% of active duty service members and 38% of National Guard and Reserve who qualify for VA services and are in need of health care actually use services.

Frequency and intensity of exposure to combat experiences and long and multiple deployments are strongly associated with risk of chronic Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), other mental health and substance use issues, and impairment in relation to family, work, social and other areas of functioning (Mental Health Advisory Team Five, 2008). Members of the military are at high risk for experiencing a wide range of traumatic events from being injured or sustaining traumatic brain injury to witnessing or suffering from the aftermath of violence.

In 2007, Governor Richardson proposed to expand treatment for veterans, active military, and families involved in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. The legislature allocated \$1.5 million to support Veteran and Family Support Services (VFSS).

The VFSS has strong partnerships with veteran-serving organizations, which include the State of New Mexico, Presbyterian Medical Services, the New Mexico Behavioral Health Collaborative, OptumHealth NM, the Veterans Administration, and the UNM Center for Rural and Community Behavioral Health (CRCBH). These organizations have coordinated to address the needs of New Mexico's veterans through two unique service programs. Veteran and Family Support Services began in the Fall of 2007 in Sandoval County, and expanded to San Juan and McKinley counties in 2009; consumers have come from the surrounding nine counties to receive services. The program served 949 individuals through outreach and educational services in FY09, and 695 individuals through direct services since 2007. In the fall of 2009, the State of New Mexico received a federal grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) for a jail diversion program for veterans.

Program Description & Goals

Purpose and goals of Veteran and Family Support Services (VFSS)

The mission of VFSS is to "improve transitions of care for soldiers, veterans, and their families experiencing issues associated with trauma and other behavioral health problems through quality and comprehensive behavioral health and medication management, support services, education, training, and outreach."

The VFSS is a clinical program run by Presbyterian Medical Services (PMS) designed to address the needs of New Mexico veterans by providing case management, brief therapy, and linkages to community services, comprehensive outreach activities to educate and recruit veterans, family members, and providers. VFSS also coordinates services across systems, provides state-wide training, and presents at workshops for soldiers and their families.

Purpose and goals of Veteran's First Jail Diversion Program (VF-JDP)

Purpose: To expand the capacity of the State's behavioral health system to provide evidence-based trauma informed treatment to adult veterans and others involved in the criminal justice system, with priority populations being Veterans and Native Americans.

Goal #1: To divert veterans with trauma spectrum disorders from the justice system by increasing recognition of SMI and reactions to trauma by law enforcement agencies and courts.

Goal #2: To build capacity to provide appropriate trauma informed behavioral health services in order to prevent the identified population from returning to the justice system.

Goal #3: To support a sustainable trauma informed treatment approach.

VF-JDP is a project within Veterans and Family Support Services (VFSS) that will, in conjunction with the 13th Judicial Court and tribal courts, identify individuals with mental illnesses and co-occurring substance use disorders who come into contact with the judicial system to divert them to treatment from incarceration before adjudication. Referrals will be made by law enforcement, district attorneys, and judges who receive extensive education on trauma, serious mental illness and substance abuse. Law enforcement have been trained in crisis intervention. Pre-trial specialists who have access to court dockets also recruit participants. Seeking Safety (SS) will be utilized for treatment, which is an evidence-based practice that meets the needs of individuals diagnosed with both Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and substance use disorders.

Unique elements include:

- ◆ A State Advisory Committee (SAC) so that state agencies are involved with planning and overseeing the program implementation. Members include: veterans, veteran advocacy groups, the Behavioral Health Services Division, NM Departments of Veteran Services, Corrections, Parole and Probation, Health, Indian Affairs, Human Services, Workforce Solutions, Children, Youth, and Families Department, the State Attorney General's Office, NM Mortgage Finance Authority, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, VF-JDP staff and PMS, OptumHealth, and UNM Center for Rural and Community Behavioral Health.
- ◆ A Native American Advisory Committee (NAAC) subcommittee will be established representing diverse tribes and having input into planning, implementation, and evaluation specific to NA Veterans.

Pilot areas will be targeted before expansion throughout the state (starting with Sandoval County), ensuring that the model will work across diverse communities and populations.

Role of CRCBH and Future Directions

UNM CRCBH's Unique Role in VFSS and VF-JDP

Funding and Grant Writing

UNM CRCBH helped develop the VFSS program with the State and PMS and has worked with these groups to find financial support to continually fund veterans behavioral health services. UNM CRCBH took the lead in writing the VF-JDP grant proposal which provided New Mexico with funding for this project, linking us to the larger nation-wide program.

Program Evaluation

Since VFSS services began in 2007, UNM CRCBH has been conducting a program evaluation. Data collected includes demographic information and reason for seeking services from all individuals seeking VFSS services, service utilization, cost data, behavioral health outcome data, and data on workshops and trainings provided. Along with the State Behavioral Health Services Division and PMS, we report this data to the State Legislature.

Data will be collected for individuals in VF-JDP on mental health, substance abuse, trauma history, arrest history, and services used while in the program. Specific focus will be placed on questions regarding head trauma, post traumatic stress disorder symptom severity and substance abuse severity. Program evaluation will include data on clinician adherence to the Seeking Safety model. We utilize a Continuous Quality Improvement Framework to provide feedback to providers and the larger behavioral health system on unique implementation strategies and best practices for New Mexico, and develop a sustainability strategy to ensure policy development and sustainability.

The data will help us understand the challenges and problems New Mexico veterans are dealing with, and will allow us to identify specific services and activities that are the most effective in helping veterans attain health and stay out of jail. The data will also be used as a foundation for seeking additional funding from State and Federal funding agencies for other programs serving veterans in the State. The data will also have implications nationally by suggesting best practices approaches for providing treatment to veteran populations.

Future Directions

Goals for the future include:

- ◆ Develop a long-term sustainability plan, including seeking additional federal and state funding. This includes working with State agencies and the State Legislature to allocate dollars from the State general fund and behavioral health budgets.
- ◆ Utilize and share data with PMS and the State to develop best practices for providing behavioral health services to veterans in New Mexico.
- ◆ Continue work with PMS, State of New Mexico agencies, and community partners to expand VFSS and VF-JDP services throughout the state.
- ◆ Developing stronger partnerships with Native American Tribes to provide culturally competent services to Native American Veterans.
- ◆ Use data from the VF-JDP outcome study to support future funding for similar programs and to promote sustainability.

For more information on the VFSS and VF-JDP program, upcoming events, or information on how to access services, go to <http://www.nmvets.com/> or call (505) 896 – 0928.

For more information about the UNM CRCBH program evaluation please contact Brian Isakson (bisakson@salud.unm.edu)



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<http://hsc.unm.edu/som/psychiatry/CRCBH>