



McLennan County Veterans Treatment Court

AN OVERVIEW

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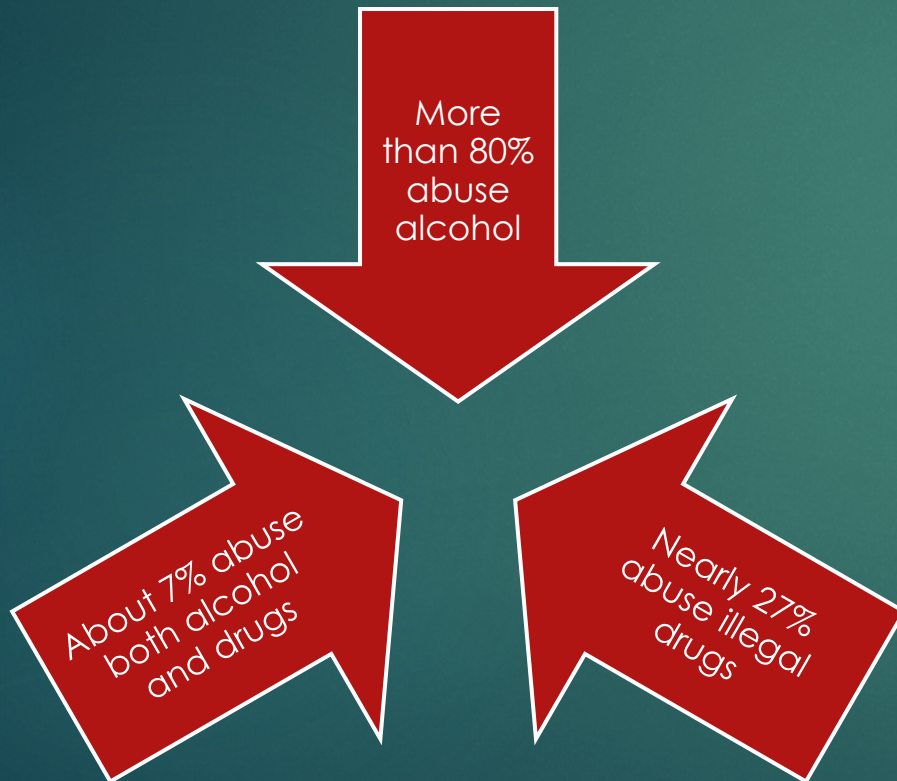
GENERAL ASSOCIATE JUDGE MCLENNAN COUNTY, TEXAS

Statistics regarding Veterans and Substance Abuse and Mental Health

- ▶ The Veteran population is at an increased risk for using alcohol and controlled substances in problematic ways and from suffering co-occurring mental health disorders. This is due to a variety of experiences linked directly to military service. Military culture, exposure to stressors and trauma related to combat, the development of mental health disorders such as post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and chronic pain or physical health issues can all influence substance abuse.
- ▶ Approximately 11% of veterans who visit a VA medical facility for the first time have a substance abuse disorder (SUD). Substance abuse is linked to trauma, homelessness, mental health disorders, physical health issues, increased risk of suicide and problems at work and in relationships.

Co-occurring issues

Substance abuse



Co-occurring Mental Health issues

- ▶ Veterans who have an SUD are 3-4 times more likely to be diagnosed with depression.
- ▶ Nearly 10% of veterans have symptoms of anxiety, while 11% have symptoms of depression.
- ▶ Nearly 25% of veterans have PTSD.
- ▶ Between 82%-93% of veterans who served in Afghanistan and Iraq with an SUD had a least one co-occurring disorder.

Specific SUDs and Mental Health Issues

SUDs

- ▶ In 2018, 874,000 veterans aged 26 or older had an alcohol use disorder.
- ▶ Nearly 11% of veterans were admitted to treatment centers for heroin use. 41,000 had an addiction to painkillers.
- ▶ More than 6% were admitted to treatment centers for cocaine.
- ▶ In 2020, 256,000 used methamphetamine and 67,000 used LSD.

Mental Health Issues

- ▶ 24 veterans die by suicide each day with an additional 20 dying each day by overdose.
- ▶ In 2020, about 8% of homeless adults were veterans.
- ▶ Depression is the most commonly diagnosed mental illness among female veterans.

McLennan County Veterans Treatment Court Process

- ▶ Our treatment court is a voluntary, court-monitored treatment program that addresses the mental health and/or substance abuse issues of veterans with criminal justice involved cases which utilizes evidence based best practices that help the participants get back on track to being productive members of our community.
- ▶ Available to a veteran who has been honorably discharged from the military.
- ▶ Up to 30 participants can be in the program at one time.
- ▶ The program consists of four phases of varying lengths. Minimum time in the program is 12 months with the typical time to complete being about 18 months.
- ▶ District Attorney's Office must agree to the veteran's participation in the program.
- ▶ Defense attorney and veteran complete an application which is submitted to our office. This application provides detailed information about the history of the veteran including identification data, criminal history, mental health history, substance abuse history, military involvement and discharge history, statement of veteran indicating why the mental health history or SUD have contributed to their arrest.
- ▶ Detailed psychological/mental health assessment is done by member of the treatment team. (Baylor University Psychology Graduate School Program)

Treatment team

- ▶ Court staff : Specialty Court director and assistant
- ▶ Asst. District Attorney
- ▶ Defense attorney
- ▶ Probation Officer
- ▶ Caseworker from the VA
- ▶ Treatment providers such as drug counselors
- ▶ Law enforcement officer
- ▶ Veterans One Stop representative
- ▶ Baylor University Psychology Graduate student/supervisor
- ▶ Judge

Specific process for admission

- ▶ Following the application, an assessment is done by the caseworker to make sure the veteran qualifies.
- ▶ Upon qualification, a psycho-social assessment is done by the Baylor graduate student.
 - ▶ This assessment consist of a battery of psychological tests and risk/need assessments.
- ▶ Staffing takes place before court where the psycho-social assessment is presented to the treatment team.
- ▶ Applicant appears before the treatment team at a presentation hearing so that questions can be asked and answered.
- ▶ Decision is made by the treatment team whether to accept the applicant.
- ▶ If accepted, the referring court, applicant and original defense attorney are notified, and the applicant is given a formal initial court date to appear in the Specialty Court. Court meets every Wednesday.

Typical day in Court

- ▶ Staffing:

- ▶ Treatment team meets for approximately an hour before court to discuss the docket for the day.
- ▶ Each participant's status is reviewed.
 - ▶ What have they done since the last court appearance?
 - ▶ Have they met with the treatment team and attended any meetings as required?
 - ▶ What are the results of any drug tests performed?
 - ▶ What is their employment and housing status?
 - ▶ Are there any specific issues that have arisen?
 - ▶ What is the treatment plan to address issues?
 - ▶ What are the appropriate incentives or sanctions for participant's behavior?

Court proceedings

- ▶ All participants come to court and each participant's case is called individually.
- ▶ Any issues that the veteran is having are addressed and veteran is given the opportunity to answer any questions about those issues.
- ▶ Veteran is given an opportunity to raise any specific questions or issues they might be having.
- ▶ Veteran is informed about the incentive or sanction.
 - ▶ Incentives: Incentive wheel includes gift cards, treasure box, fishbowl, candy, FIFO, Zoom hearing, curfew extension.
 - ▶ Sanctions: no incentive, thinking report, community service, watch court proceedings, more treatment, more drug testing, additional court appearances, jail, long term incarcerated treatment at the Valor Program in McKinney, Tx.

Graduation

- ▶ Formal graduation proceeding where all participants are required to attend.
- ▶ Each graduate is recognized with certificate of graduation, bracelet from court, honor coin, expunction and dismissal paperwork, quilt of valor.
- ▶ Graduates are asked a few questions about what the court process has meant to them, how has their life changed, etc.
- ▶ All of the Specialty Court graduations are held at the same time 4 times a year.





What is the value of a Veterans Treatment Court?

- ▶ Veteran Treatments courts can improve outcomes in recidivism, mental health, social functioning, housing and employment.
- ▶ While involved in Veterans court, only 14% of Veterans had new incarceration, compared to 23% to 46% of defendants in traditional courts.
- ▶ Nearly 90% of Veterans with co-occurring PTSD didn't have any other arrests while involved in the treatment court.
- ▶ About 10% more veterans were in their own housing at program exit than at admission.
- ▶ About 29% who were not receiving VA benefits at program entrance were receiving those benefits upon program exit.
- ▶ One of the key strengths of treatment courts is the ability to provide personalized support with medical/psychiatric/substance abuse care, housing assistance, employment opportunities with the overall goal of focusing on rehabilitation instead of incarceration. Ultimately, this compassionate alternative to traditional justice processes save money for taxpayers while addressing the unique challenges faced by veterans.