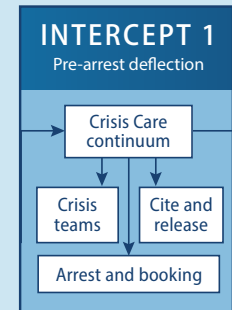


Veterans Justice Outreach Toolkit: The Sequential Intercept Model

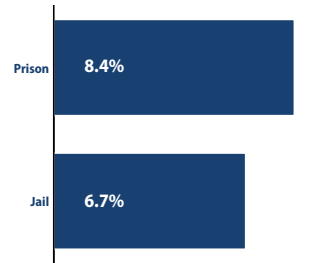
Intercept 1: Pre-Arrest Diversion

Introduction: Intercept 1 focuses on pre-arrest diversion, creating opportunities for law enforcement, emergency services, and community providers to connect Veterans to appropriate resources without involving the criminal justice system. Key actors at this stage include law enforcement officers, crisis intervention teams, peer specialists, and Veteran Service Organizations. Officers can identify Veteran status through standardized screening questions such as, “Have you ever served in the military?” and assess potential mental health or substance use needs. This allows them to facilitate warm handoffs to crisis response teams, VA services, or other community-based programs. Pre-arrest diversion seeks to prevent Veterans from entering the justice system, whereas diversion provides alternatives to incarceration once an encounter (arrest) has occurred. Strong collaboration among law enforcement, emergency responders, and Veteran-specific service providers ensures Veterans receive timely support, reducing unnecessary arrests and promoting long-term stability.



100,000
–
180,000

Veterans are incarcerated in the United States each year.¹



Veterans make up 8.4% and 6.7% of U.S. prison and jail populations, respectively.²

Suicide Prevention Opportunities Related to Intercept 1

- First responders, including law enforcement and emergency services, should receive training in military culture and Veteran-specific resources. This will equip them to recognize unique risk factors and connect Veterans to appropriate care quickly and respectfully.
- Law enforcement and community-based services should receive training to recognize and respond to Veterans in crisis, ensuring they are connected to care through structured warm handoffs rather than being left to navigate services alone.



Strengths and Protective Factors for Suicide Prevention

Service members, Veterans, and their families possess resilience, discipline, and a strong sense of camaraderie, which serve as protective factors in preventing criminal justice involvement. Veterans benefit from structured environments, mission-driven engagement, and access to specialized mental health and substance use treatment programs tailored to their experiences. When properly identified and connected to support services, Veterans can leverage their problem-solving skills, adaptability, and cooperative abilities to successfully navigate challenges.

Protective factors, such as access to crisis intervention teams, peer mentorship, and Veteran-specific community programs, provide essential support systems that promote recovery and stability. Integrating early identification and warm handoffs to appropriate services at Intercept 1 allows Veterans to receive the help they need without justice system involvement, reinforcing their strengths and fostering long-term well-being.

Spotlight: Cincinnati (OH) Military Liaison Group

To support identification and pre-arrest diversion of Veterans in the criminal justice system, the Cincinnati Police Department created a Military Liaison Group (MLG) in 2014. The MLG is a designated Veterans response team consisting of law enforcement officers with military backgrounds that coordinate and support police response to Veterans in crisis or in need of community services. Officers within the MLG provide culturally appropriate responses to Veterans in need and deflect them away from the criminal justice system in favor of the VA health-care system and other community providers.³



Recommendations



Policymakers

Allocate resources to build and support prevention infrastructure that facilitates early screening, referral, and care for Veterans involved in the justice system.



Criminal Justice System Professionals

Strengthen internal policies and training practices for identifying Veterans by consistently asking, “Have you ever served in the military?” at the point of encounter. Professionals should also connect with their local Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) specialists to build a working relationship and co-develop a response plan that ensures timely diversion to the most appropriate community and VA resources. Other resources to facilitate Veteran identification include the Veterans Reentry Search Service (VRSS) and the Status Query and Response Exchange System (SQUARES).



VA Police and Crisis Intervention Team

Partner with VA police to explore how they can help ensure a veteran in crisis is connected to VA or community care. VA police often receive Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training tailored to Veterans.



Community Members

Advocate for the funding and sustainment of community-based resources to connect Veterans to mental health and substance use treatment as well as social services to divert Veterans from the criminal justice system before arrest.

Related Resources

- [National Veterans Training Institute](#)
- [VetResources Community Network \(VRCN\)](#) | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
- [Veterans Justice Outreach](#) | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
- [VA Homeless Programs](#) | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
- [GAINS Center for Behavioral Health and Justice Transformation](#)

References

- 1 Jennifer Bronson, E. Ann Carson, Margaret Noonan, and Marcus Berzofsky, "Veterans in Prison and Jail, 2011–12," *Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice*, 2015, NCJ 249144, <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/vpj1112.pdf>.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Craig McKee, "Cincinnati Program to Be Model for New Statewide Response to Veteran Crises," *WCPO 9 News*, March 14, 2023, <https://www.wcpo.com/news/our-community/homefront/cincinnati-program-to-be-model-for-new-statewide-response-to-veteran-crises>.