

On Veterans Health Care

MYTH: A Veteran with criminal convictions or a history of incarceration is not eligible for VA health care.

FACT: An eligible Veteran, who is not currently incarcerated, can use VA care regardless of any criminal history, including incarceration. Only when an otherwise eligible Veteran is currently incarcerated, or in fugitive status, are they not able to use VA health care.

By regulation, the Veterans Administration (VA) cannot provide health care services to Veterans who are patients or incarcerated individuals of another government agency's institution, if that agency has a duty to provide the care. Because jails and prisons must provide health care for their incarcerated individuals, VA cannot treat Veterans while they are incarcerated.

For Veterans who are not currently incarcerated and are otherwise eligible for VA health care, past involvement with the criminal justice system has no impact on their ability to enroll for or to receive health care. The only exception applies to Veterans with an open warrant for a felony offense (fugitive felons), whom VA is prohibited from treating by a separate Federal law.

Because Veterans with criminal histories face additional barriers to employment and other services in their communities, and may be at increased risk for homelessness, VA has two programs designed specifically to reach Veterans involved with the criminal justice system:

- **Health Care for Reentry Veterans**, which provides direct outreach to Veterans nearing release from state and federal prisons, emphasizing rapid linkage to needed health care and other VA and community services; and
- **Veterans Justice Outreach**, which connects Veterans in contact with the “front end” of the system (police, courts, and jails) to mental health, substance use, and other treatment resources. Every VA medical center has a Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist who serves as the VA's liaison with the local criminal justice system.

For More Information

VA Benefits Booklet

http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/benefits_book.asp

Health Care Eligibility

<http://www.va.gov/healtheligibility/>

Health Care for Reentry Veterans

<http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/Reentry.asp>

Veterans Justice Outreach

<http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/VJO.asp>