



# Dispatch from the Front Lines

The National Clearinghouse for Veterans Treatment Courts at the National Association of Drug Court Professionals

August 2012

## State Departments/Commissions of Veterans Affairs *States Providing Invaluable Assistance to Veterans Treatment Courts*

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Veterans Treatment Courts across the nation benefit tremendously by partnering with their respective State Department or Commission of Veterans Affairs. This Dispatch provides Veterans Treatment Court practitioners a guide regarding the many benefits and resources offered by their state and how to utilize these for Participants in court.

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States across the U.S., as well as the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, have a

State Department or Commission of Veterans Affairs with its own traditions, programs and resources charged with carrying out benefits and services to their veterans.<sup>1</sup> These agencies are second only to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in providing benefits and services to veterans and are led by a Director or Commissioner.<sup>2</sup>

For purposes of this Dispatch, a State Department or Commission of Veterans Affairs is referred to as a State Agency of Veterans Affairs.

### **State Agency of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Service Officers**

*Assisting Veterans in Court with the State and Federal Benefits they have Earned*

Veterans Treatment Courts can benefit the most from their State Agency of Veterans Affairs by collaborating with Veterans Service Officers. State Agency of Veterans Affairs Veterans Service Officers are trained professionals who assist veterans with obtaining the federal and state benefits they have earned through military service.

<sup>1</sup>National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs. 2012. 10 May. 2012 <http://www.nasdva.us>

<sup>2</sup>About Us National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs. 2012. 10 May. 2012 <http://www.nasdva.us/about>

Veterans Service Officers are located in counties as well as VA Hospitals/Outpatient Clinics and/or VA Regional Offices. Veterans Service Officers

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are typically accredited by the VA to act as the veteran's legal advocate.

### **Benefits and Services Veterans May Qualify for from their State Agency of Veterans Affairs**

Because each state varies, Justice For Vets strongly encourages Veterans Treatment Courts to contact their State Agency of Veterans Affairs to inquire about the benefits, resources and services unique for their state. In most cases, a veteran's time in service, disability, branch of service, and time served in a combat zone affects the veteran's qualifications.

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Listed are some of the benefits and services provided by a State Agency of Veterans Affairs that are applicable to Participants.

- Many states store copies of a veteran's DD-214 for individuals released from military service whose home of record is the state from where they joined the Armed Forces. A DD-214 is a standard Department of Defense separation document which states a veteran's military service. In some instances, Participants may not possess their DD-214 and Veterans Treatment Courts can access this vital document by contacting their State Agency of Veterans Affairs. DD-214s are important to verify military service for VA health care

and benefits, as well as other local, state and federal benefits.

- High school diplomas are offered by states for veterans who did not complete high school because their education was interrupted due to enlistment in the Armed Forces. This may apply significantly to Vietnam veterans as many joined the military before completing the requirements to graduate from high school.
- In many cases, states will waive or offer a reduced property tax based on a veteran's VA disability rating. Many Participants in Veterans Treatment Courts have a VA disability rating and a reduced or waived property tax can help ease financial hardship.
- States may waive sales tax to qualified service connected disabled veterans.
- Some states have funds specifically to support veterans programs. Emergency grants may be one of these programs and are offered to veterans who have suffered financial hardship, such as sudden unemployment or other circumstance that may cause the veteran to seek monetary assistance.
- Many states' offer tuition waivers for in-state colleges and universities for veterans whose home of record is the state from where they joined the Armed Forces. Some states even offer tuition waivers for veterans attending state colleges and universities who are not residents of that state.
- Veterans hiring preference points may be offered to qualified veterans for state employment positions.
- Most states motor vehicle departments offer a reduced auto fee registration and/or auto tag to qualified veterans.
- Several states across the U.S. waive or offer a reduced fee for entrance into state parks and gaming licenses for certain veterans.
- States also offer a number of benefits and services to children and/or spouses of veterans such as a reduction or waiver in tuition at state supported colleges and universities.

## **Role of the State Agency of Veterans Affairs: Veterans Service Officer in Court**

The following is provided as a guide to assist Veterans Treatment Courts working with Veterans Service Officers in court. It is important to note, rural Veterans Treatment Courts can benefit tremendously by partnering with their State

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### ***Veterans Service Officer Responsibilities***

1. Attend all Veterans Treatment Court sessions, when scheduled.
2. Provide updated information to the Veterans Treatment Court team on the federal benefits that are available to Participants as changes occur at the state and/or national level.
3. Provide ongoing education on local, state and/or federal benefits for Participants and dependents, including, but not limited to health, education, training, disability compensation and/or pension.
4. Be supportive and helpful to Participants in Veterans Treatment Court.
5. Advocate on behalf of the Participants interfacing in a professional manner with the Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA) and Veterans Health Administration (VHA) either in court or outside of court, as needed.
6. Act as a liaison between the State Agency of Veterans Affairs, VBA, VHA and Veterans Treatment Court.
7. Communicate to the Veterans Treatment Court the status of a Participant's claim for VA disability compensation and/or pension, education and training benefits or any other information applicable to the success of the Participant's claim that the court may need to know.

8. Adhere to all of the Veterans Treatment Court program's policies and procedures.
9. Complete the required initial training as specified by the court prior to participation in the Veterans Treatment Court.
10. Participate in any required additional training as required by the court.

### ***Veterans Service Officer Duties***

1. Interview incoming Participants and assess their needs and eligibility as related to state and federal benefits to include but not limited to the areas of VA disability compensation and/or pension, education, training and/or Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E).
2. Perform case management duties throughout the duration of Participants' time in the Veterans Treatment Court by researching information, compiling reports, filing claims, formulating appeals if needed, and obtaining benefits, as well as interpreting VA and Department of Defense laws, rules, regulations and procedures.
3. Advise Participants of any documentation required to support claims for VA disability compensation and make referrals to other local, state and federal agencies as needed.
4. Review VA rating board decisions insuring compliance with Title 38 U.S. Code of Federal Regulations and determine if an appeal is warranted. If an appeal is warranted initiate the appeals process by preparing a written brief outlining the basis of the disagreement and obtain a Power of Attorney from the Participant to utilize if necessary.

## **County Veterans Service Officers**

In many states, county governments have a County Veterans Service Officer who assists veterans with the local, state and federal benefits earned through military service. These individuals perform many of the same duties as Veterans Service Officers working for state governments. For a complete nationwide listing, go to [www.nacvso.org](http://www.nacvso.org).

## **NASDVA**

The National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) is an organization represented by the Chief Executive Officers or State Directors of Veterans Affairs in each state as well as the District of Columbia,

American Samoa, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. NASDVA is a great resource for courts and at their 2011 national convention, the Chief Executive Officers and State Directors of Veterans Affairs passed a resolution in support of Veterans Treatment Courts. For more information visit [www.nasdva.us](http://www.nasdva.us).

### **For Veterans Treatment Courts**

To download the NASDVA resolution and to find out more about how Veterans Treatment Courts can utilize their State Agency of Veterans Affairs visit [www.JusticeForVets.org](http://www.JusticeForVets.org).

### **About Justice For Vets**

In 2009, the National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP) launched Justice For Vets: The National Clearinghouse for Veterans Treatment Courts. Justice For Vets is exclusively committed to ensuring that veterans involved in the criminal justice system have access to Veterans Treatment Courts and the benefits, services and treatment they have earned. Since Justice For Vets was launched, the number of operational Veterans Treatment Courts has grown to over 90. Justice For Vets activities include advocating for federal Veterans Treatment Court funding, assisting with

state legislation, training and technical assistance, public awareness, and building coalitions within the criminal justice, business, and Veterans Service Organization communities. Visit Justice For Vets online at [www.JusticeForVets.org](http://www.JusticeForVets.org).

### **About National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP)**

Since 1994, NADCP, a non-profit organization 501(c)(3) representing over 27,000 multi-disciplinary justice professionals and community leaders, has worked tirelessly at the national, state and local level to create and enhance Drug Courts. NADCP is recognized as the experts in the field of addiction and its intersection with the criminal justice system. In 1998, NADCP launched the National Drug Court Institute (NDCI). To date, NDCI has directly trained 65,440 Drug Court professionals from all fifty states and U.S. territories as well as sixteen other countries. Because of the breadth, quality and impact of NADCP, the Drug Court field has grown from fourteen programs in 1994 to 2,800 Drug Courts currently in operation. Visit NADCP online at [www.AllRise.org](http://www.AllRise.org).

### **About Matt Stiner**

Matt Stiner is the Director of Justice For Vets at NADCP. After receiving the Combat Action Ribbon for service in Iraq as a Marine, Stiner used VA Education benefits and the Harry S. Truman Scholarship to obtain a Masters in Public Administration from the University of Oklahoma. Stiner began his career in public service in the Tulsa Mayor's Office and then worked in the Tulsa Veterans Treatment Court.

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