REENTRY MYTH BUSTER!

On Veterans Health Care

A Product of the Federal Interagency Reentry Council

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 felon status, is he or she not able to use VA health care.

By regulation, the Veterans Administration (VA) cannot provide health care services to Veterans who are patients or inmates 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 inmates, 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

What is a REENTRY MYTH BUSTER?

This Myth Buster is one in a series of fact sheets intended to clarify existing Federal policies that affect formerly incarcerated individuals and their families. Each year, more than 700,000 individuals are released from state and Federal prisons. Another 9 million cycle through local jails. When reentry fails, the social and economic costs are high -- more crime, more victims, more family distress, and more pressure on already-strained state and municipal budgets.

Because reentry intersects with health and housing, education and employment, family, faith, and community well-being, many Federal agencies are focusing on initiatives for the reentry population. Under the auspices of the Cabinet-level interagency Reentry Council, Federal agencies are working together to enhance community safety and well-being, assist those returning from prison and jail in becoming productive citizens, and save taxpayer dollars by lowering the direct and collateral costs of incarceration.

For more information about the Reentry Council, go to:
www.nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/reentry-council