



# NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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## **VA/Community Launch Veterans' Pretrial Diversion Program**

**OMAHA**, Neb. — A new Veterans' Pretrial Diversion program was launched today in Lancaster County, Neb.

The Department of Veterans Affairs Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System (VA NWIHCS) is collaborating with the Lancaster County Attorney's Office and the Lincoln Community Foundation.

The program is for Veterans and active-duty service men and women who are charged with some non-violent criminal offenses.

Although the goal is to combine traditional pretrial diversion goals of increasing public safety and holding offenders accountable, it also is intended help connect the Veteran with appropriate VA services and treatment programs.

The program is part of the VA's Veteran Justice Outreach (VJO) Initiative, which is intended to avoid the unnecessary criminalization of mental illness and extended incarceration among Veterans. The goal is to ensure that eligible justice-involved Veterans have timely access to VA mental health and substance use services, when clinically indicated, and other services and benefits as appropriate.

For Veterans or service members to participate in the program, they must meet the following three criteria:

- Are eligible for full VA health care benefits,
- Have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury related to his or her military service, and,
- Can show a connection between the service-related trauma and the charged criminal conduct.

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## VETERANS PRETRIAL DIVERSION-2/2/2/2/

Applicants with prior criminal histories including violent crimes, sexual assaults, crimes involving child victims, driving under the influence and assaultive behavior are not eligible to participate. The Lancaster County Attorney determines which applicants are eligible to participate.

The VA NWIHCS VJO coordinator will work with the Lancaster County Attorney's office to evaluate Veterans who are identified as eligible for VA benefits, and who are charged with a criminal offense that meets the criteria. VA will assess each Veteran for benefits eligibility, create a link with available treatment programs and assist him or her through the difficult times faced in the legal system.

In addition, VA is seeking "mentors," who can assist the Veteran to navigate through the legal process. Ideal mentors may be Veterans or community members who have been through the legal system themselves. To volunteer as a mentor for a Veteran in this program, call Tami Osburn, VJO coordinator, at 402-599-2183 or e-mail [tami.osburn@va.gov](mailto:tami.osburn@va.gov).

The VA's Veterans Justice Outreach Initiative encourages local medical facility staff to work with court systems and local law enforcement to provide outreach to justice-involved Veterans in the communities where they live. For more about the VJO program, visit <http://www.va.gov/homeless/VJO.asp>.

The Lincoln Community Foundation was funded by the Council on Federations to develop the Lancaster County Veterans' Support Initiative: a replication model for community foundation-led collaborative that seeks to improve the circumstances of service members and their families as they transition home from war.

The VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System's mission is to honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being. VA NWIHCS employees serve more than 161,000 Veterans in Nebraska, western Iowa and portions of Kansas and Missouri. The system includes a tertiary medical center in Omaha and a Community Living Center in Grand Island, Neb. Community-based outpatient clinics are located in Lincoln, Grand Island, North Platte, Norfolk, and Bellevue, Neb., and Shenandoah, Iowa; and a contract outreach clinic in O'Neill, Neb. For more information, visit <http://www.nebraska.va.gov>.

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