



FLORIDA POLICY PROJECT

BEST PRACTICES, BETTER OUTCOMES

Improving Veterans' Incarceration and Reentry in Florida:

Leaving No Veteran Behind

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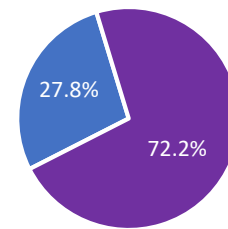
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- Despite efforts to limit the incarceration of veterans, many are still serving time in Florida prisons.
- Approximately 5% of Florida prison inmates self-identify as veterans. The real number of veterans incarcerated in Florida is likely greater.
- 29% of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) veterans report a lifetime prevalence of Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Veterans of Desert Storm (21%), and Vietnam (10%) report lower levels of PTSD.¹
- 5-35% of OIF/OEF veterans experienced mild traumatic brain injuries (mTBI).
- The comorbidity of PTSD with mTBI is 36.8% among veterans compared to 15.7% among civilians.²
- PTSD and TBI, separately and in combination, have been linked to violence especially when compounded with substance abuse.³
- TBI and other trauma including military sexual trauma (MST) have been linked with sexual offending.⁴
- Veterans incarcerated in Florida tend to be serving sentences that exceed 10 years. Over 75% of veterans are serving a sentence over 10 years and almost 58% are serving sentences that exceed 20 years.
- Given the long sentences being served by veterans incarcerated in Florida, it is unsurprising that over 72% of veterans incarcerated in Florida prisons are over the age of 50 (qualifying them as elderly according to Florida Statute 944.02).
- Facilities that house more people over the age of 50 spend 14 times more on prescription drugs and 5 times more on medical care.⁵

Florida Veterans' Sentence Length	
5 years or fewer	12.9%
5 to 10 years	10.5%
10 to 20 years	18.8%
20 years or more	57.9%

Veterans Incarcerated in Florida Prisons



■ Non-Elderly ■ Elderly

Given the challenges faced by veterans, legislators should look at solutions to:

1. Improve incarceration and reentry for veterans in Florida's prisons.
2. Expand identification efforts and data dissemination of veterans in Florida's prisons.
3. Connect veterans with eligible benefits through innovative strategies and early identification.

The table that follows describes promising approaches rooted in evidence-based practices used by other states and the federal government. Implementing the programs described and passing legislation around veteran identification and data dissemination will help guarantee that no veteran is left behind.

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PRACTICE	PROGRAM	POTENTIAL OUTCOMES	CURRENT APPROACH	RECOMMENDED ACTION
IDENTIFICATION AND DATA DISSEMINATION	Veteran Re-entry Search Service (VRSS)	<p>Use VA service to more accurately identify veterans in Florida's prisons.</p> <p>Increase VA outreach, reduce state costs by connecting veterans with earned federal benefits.</p>	Inmate self-identification of veterans' status.	<i>Mandate the use of VRSS by all agencies to connect veterans with the benefits they have earned.</i>
	Data dissemination	Increase information for policymakers, practitioners, the VA, and non-profits about the scope and needs of Florida's incarcerated veterans.	No data is currently made publicly available.	<i>Require the publication of veteran specific data in DOC's Annual Report and Prison Recidivism Report.</i>
IN-PRISON PROGRAMS	Veterans Housing Units <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Veterans Moving Forward 	16% of participants recidivated in the first 12-months of release compared to 27% among the comparison group.	FL currently uses veterans housing units in some facilities but has not evaluated their effectiveness.	<i>Fund an evidence-based pilot and evaluation of veterans housing units at facilities that incarcerate the highest proportion of veterans.</i>
	Trauma-Informed Mental Health Care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strength at Home TARGET 	<p>Reduce aggression and intimate partner violence.</p> <p>Reduce PTSD, depression, anxiety, and increase emotional regulation.</p>	It is unclear what trauma-informed mental health care is available for veteran-specific needs. No known evaluated programs appear to be made available.	<i>Fund evidence-based pilots and evaluations of veteran-specific trauma-informed mental health programs at facilities that incarcerate the highest proportion of veterans.</i>
TRANSITIONAL SERVICES	Reentry Roadmap	Connect veterans with people, organizations, and services that can provide veteran-specific guidance.	No similar resource appears to be made available to incarcerated veterans.	<i>Create a partnership between FDOC, local, state, and federal veterans' stakeholders to create a reentry roadmap for incarcerated veterans similar to Virginia's Veterans Reentry Roadmap.</i>
	Release to Home Confinement	<p>Participants released to home confinement would be eligible for VA care, have access to retirement benefits, Medicare/Medicaid, and Social Security, none of which they are eligible for while incarcerated.</p> <p>Reduce costs associated with incarcerating veterans, especially elderly veterans.</p>	No similar program exists in Florida.	<i>Fund a pilot and evaluation of a program modeled after the elderly offender home confinement pilot deployed at the federal level but refashioned to include special dispensation for veterans (especially elderly veterans).</i>

Endnotes

¹ https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/common/common_veterans.asp

² Traumatic Brain Injury Center of Excellence. Research Review on Mild Traumatic Brain Injury and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. Military Health System and Defense Health Agency. <https://health.mil/Military-Health-Topics/Centers-of-Excellence/Traumatic-Brain-Injury-Center-of-Excellence>.

³ Blonigen, D., Bui, L., Elbogen, E., Blodgett, J., Maisel, N., Midboe, A., Asch, S., McGuire, J., & Timko, C. 2016. Risk of recidivism among justice-involved veterans: A systematic review of the literature. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 27, 812-837.

⁴ Finlay, A., McGuire, J., Bronson, J., & Sreenivasan, S. 2019. Veterans in prison for sexual offenses: characteristics and reentry service needs. *Sexual Abuse*, 31, 560-579. DelBello, M., Soutullo, C., Zimmerman, M., Sax, K., Williams, J., McElroy, S., & Strakowski, S. 1999. Traumatic brain injury in individuals convicted of sexual offenses with and without bipolar disorder. *Psychiatry Research*, 89, 281-286.

⁵ U.S. Department of Justice. Office of the Inspector General. 2016. The Impact of an Aging Inmate Population on the Federal Bureau of Prisons.