

# Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs

## Media Release

*Director John E. Lee*

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County – State Partnerships Serve Incarcerated Veterans

**King, Pierce, Thurston, and Clark County:** The Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs is partnering with several counties to serve veterans incarcerated in county jails.

For veterans, the goals are simple, get the tools and support needed to overcome the issues that led to their incarceration, and get their lives back on track. Counties save money by paying for fewer days in jail and by helping to keep offenders from becoming re-offenders.

It's called the Incarcerated Veteran's Reintegration Services Program (IVRS) and while each county tailors the program to meet its unique needs, they operate under similar principles. Veterans must be honorably discharged from military service and those incarcerated for sex offenses, arson or violent crime, are not eligible to participate.

"This is good news for veterans and their families and a clear demonstration of the emerging opportunities for partnerships between the state and counties. This is making a difference," said John Lee, director of the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs.

When a county notifies their Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs veteran's benefits specialist that a veteran has been incarcerated, the benefits specialist begins by visiting the veteran and conducting an individual assessment. These assessments establish eligibility for the program, veterans benefits, medical care and ultimately determine the path that veteran will take to be successful in their community.

By working with the county prosecutor, judge and the veteran's public defender, the veteran's benefits specialist can often recommend deferred or reduced sentencing so the veteran can begin an intensive program. Many programs include treatment for substance abuse and mental health issues and also focus on housing, medical care and ultimately employment. Veterans are closely monitored and must adhere to program requirements, and if they don't they end up back in jail to serve their sentence.

"For most, being surrounded by a veterans support network and active case management by IVRS staff helps them to focus on the changes they need to make in order to be productive citizens again and end the cycle of homelessness and incarceration," said Garry Hodgson, IVRS Program Manager. "Participants have an average recidivism rate (return to jail) of 16% compared to 42% for the general jail populations."

Funding is provided by counties through taxes collected for veterans' services, grants or levies. Currently King, Pierce, Thurston, and Clark Counties operate programs under the partnership.

In addition to the Incarcerated Veterans Reintegration Services Program, Thurston County has started a veteran court. Typically, a judge, prosecuting attorney and public defender are assigned to the veteran court providing a level of continuity and awareness of veterans programs available to help the veteran. Pierce County is also in the process of creating a Veterans Docket in their courts.

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