



MODELS FOR INTEGRATING VETERANS' SERVICES WITH TRIBAL HEALING TO WELLNESS COURTS

A guide to bridging Veteran Treatment Courts and
Tribal Healing to Wellness Courts

NATIVE VETERANS AND THWC INTEGRATION

AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE VETERANS - BACKGROUND

- American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) military service predates U.S. citizenship in all conflicts, and includes auxiliary service such as Red Cross and peace-keeping and humanitarian missions.
- AI/AN have the highest rate of service of any demographic group of people at 19%.
- Military service affects individual veterans, families, and tribal communities.

TRIBAL HEALING TO WELLNESS COURTS (THWC)

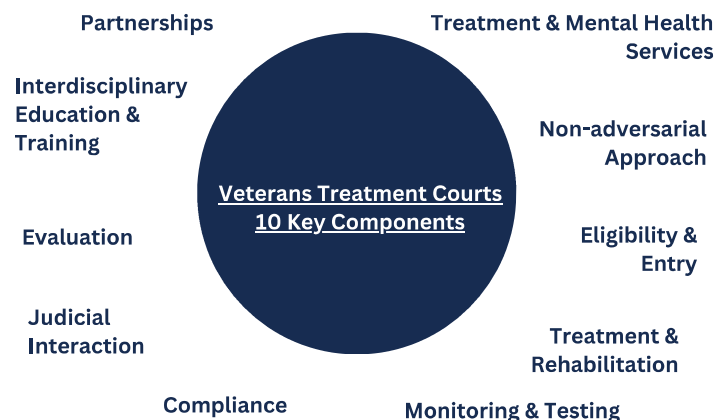
- Since 1997, Tribal Healing to Wellness Courts (THWC) are the tribal adaptations of drug courts. The terms *Problem Solving Courts* or *Treatment Courts* are now used to describe specialized court dockets assisting individuals who are justice system-involved and have a substance use disorder. Tribal Healing to Wellness Courts continue to be a beacon of hope for the devastating effects of substance abuse in Indian country.
- Tribal Healing to Wellness Court is not simply a tribal criminal or family court that orders individuals to treatment. Rather, it is an innovative and collaborative legal process that adapts the drug court concept and its key components to meet legal needs while honoring the sovereignty of Tribal Nations.

DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACTS AND EXPERIENCES



VETERANS' TREATMENT COURTS (VTC)

- Specialized veterans-only dockets allow judges to specialize and build their knowledge of the military and veteran issues, and link veterans with resources that can help with recovery, including Veterans' Justice Outreach Coordinators and representatives from other veterans' organizations or legal assistance programs.
- A primary goal of these courts is to separate people with mental health disorders and homelessness from the standard legal system and provide them with treatment and skills for rehabilitation and reintegration. This often leads to better legal results without resorting to incarceration and connects them to treatment and legal resources to assist in addressing underlying legal issues.



"Justice-involved Veterans often have mental health and substance use concerns. Veterans are more likely than non-veterans to have had a traumatic experience. These health-related concerns create needs that differ from non-veteran justice-involved adults. Justice-involved Veterans have a higher prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, substance abuse, and alcoholism. Adjusting to civilian life after military service and managing mental health and substance use issues can be difficult for Veterans, especially those who have served in combat zones, and experienced injuries, and/or emotional trauma. Veterans who do not successfully manage these conditions may experience increased homelessness, violent behaviors, and involvement with the justice system."

THE NEED FOR INTEGRATION OF SERVICES

Coordinated and culturally-rooted services to address both being AI/AN and a veteran

Veterans-specific or Native American-specific

Legal and therapeutic services aimed at addressing substance abuse and mental health

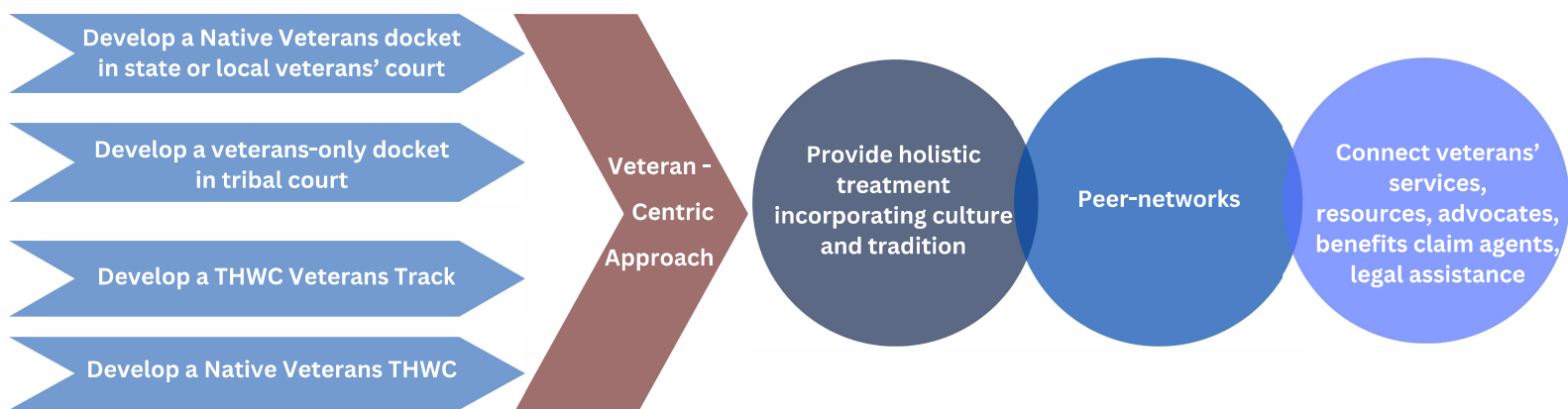
Veterans' courts are located in federal, state, and local judicial systems; and Tribal Healing to Wellness Courts located within tribal courts

TREATMENT

- Veterans' Treatment Courts and Tribal Healing to Wellness Courts focus on the root cause of underlying behavior.
- These courts prioritize individualized treatment and services to meet a participant's unique needs.
- Treatment generally helps veterans remain sober to manage physical and mental health difficulties better, reducing the risk of suicide and additional legal issues.
- Veterans who engage in a treatment court are less likely to be jailed. They receive assistance in employment and VA benefits. These initiatives assist veterans in retaining secure, independent housing, which can reduce homelessness among veterans.

PROPOSED MODELS

- Both Veterans' Treatment Courts and Tribal Healing to Wellness Courts are treatment courts that utilize a comprehensive team approach to promote the well-being of participants while addressing a legal issue. They focus on treatment and healing rather than legal consequences.
- Despite their overlapping goals, there have been very few combined programs. Some individual AI/AN veterans may participate in veterans' courts outside of tribal communities and others may find themselves before Tribal Healing to Wellness Courts. More widescale integrative programs are just starting to emerge.
- Integrated programs should prioritize holistic treatment, incorporate culture and tradition, connect veterans to services, and emphasize peer networks.
- Integrated program services provided should stem from a veteran-centric approach.



RESOURCES



TRIBAL HEALING TO WELLNESS COURTS
TLPI VETERAN RESOURCES



NATIVE VETERANS LEGAL ASSISTANCE PROJECT
NATIVE AMERICAN VETERANS ASSISTANCE



NATIONAL TREATMENT COURT RESOURCE CENTER

JUSTICE FOR VETS

This project was supported by Grant No. 2019-DC-BX-K001, awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance.