

THE TEN KEY COMPONENTS OF VETERAN TREATMENT COURTS

In 2008, the first Veterans Treatment Court was established in Buffalo, New York. There are key differences between Drug Courts, Mental Health Courts, and Veterans Treatment Courts. In attempts to set a precedent, Buffalo VTC adopted (with slight modifications) the essential tenets of the U.S. Department of Justice Publication entitled “Defining Drug Courts: The Key Components” (Jan.1997). These Key Components provide the foundation for the successful operation of a Veterans Treatment Court.

KEY COMPONENT #1 :

Veterans Treatment Court integrate alcohol, drug treatment, and mental health services with justice system case processing.

Veterans Treatment Courts promote sobriety, recovery, and stability through a coordinated response to veterans' dependency on alcohol, drugs, and/or management of their mental illness. Realization of these goals requires a team approach. This approach includes the cooperation and collaboration of the traditional partners found in drug treatment courts and mental health treatment courts with the addition of the Veteran Administration Health Care Network, veterans and veterans family support organizations, and veteran volunteer mentors.

KEY COMPONENT #2

Using a non-adversarial approach, prosecution and defense counsel promote public safety while protecting participants' due process rights

To facilitate the veterans' progress in treatment, the prosecutor and defense counsel shed their traditional adversarial courtroom relationship and worked together as a team. Once a veteran is accepted into the treatment court program, the team focuses on the veteran's recovery and law-abiding behavior—not on the merits of the pending case.

KEY COMPONENT #3

Eligible participants are identified early and promptly placed in the Veterans Treatment Court program

Early identification of veterans entering the criminal justice system is an integral part of placement in the Veterans Treatment Court program. An arrest can be a traumatic event in a person's life. It creates an immediate crisis and can compel recognition of inappropriate behavior into the open, making denial by the veteran for the need for treatment difficult.

KEY COMPONENT #4

Veterans Treatment Court provides access to a continuum of alcohol, drug, mental health, and other related treatment and rehabilitation services

While primarily concerned with criminal activity, AOD use, and mental illness, the Veterans Treatment Court team also consider co-occurring problems such as primary medical problems, transmittable diseases, homelessness; basic educational deficits, unemployment and poor job preparation; spouse and family troubles—especially domestic violence—and the ongoing effects of wartime trauma.

Veteran peer mentors are essential to the Veterans Treatment Court team. Ongoing veteran peer mentors' interaction with the Veterans Treatment Court participants is essential. Their active, supportive relationship, maintained throughout treatment, increases the likelihood that a veteran will remain in treatment and improves the chances for sobriety and law-abiding behavior.

KEY COMPONENT #5

Abstinence is monitored by frequent alcohol and other drug testing

Frequent court-ordered AOD testing is essential. An accurate testing program is the most objective and efficient way to establish a framework for accountability and gauge each participant's progress.

KEY COMPONENT #6

Ongoing judicial interaction with each Veteran is essential

A veteran's progress through the treatment court experience is measured by his or her compliance with the treatment regimen. Veterans Treatment Court rewards cooperation as well as responds to noncompliance. Veterans Treatment Court establishes a coordinated strategy, including a continuum of graduated responses, to continuing drug use and other non-compliant behavior.

KEY COMPONENT #7

Ongoing judicial interaction with each Veteran is essential

The judge is the leader of the Veterans Treatment Court team. This active, supervising relationship, maintained throughout treatment, increases the likelihood that a veteran will remain in treatment and improves the chances for sobriety and law-abiding behavior. Ongoing judicial supervision also communicates to veterans that someone in authority cares about them and closely monitors what they do.

KEY COMPONENT #8

Monitoring and evaluation measure the achievement of program goals and gauge effectiveness

Management and monitoring systems provide timely and accurate information about program progress. Program monitoring provides oversight and periodic measurements of the program's performance against its stated goals and objectives. Information and conclusions developed from periodic monitoring reports, process evaluation activities, and longitudinal evaluation studies may be used to modify the program.

KEY COMPONENT #9

Continuing interdisciplinary education promotes effective Veterans Treatment Court planning, implementation, and operations

All Veterans Treatment Court staff should be involved in education and training. Interdisciplinary education exposes criminal justice officials to veteran treatment issues and Veteran Administration, veteran volunteer mentors, and treatment staff to criminal justice issues. It also develops shared understandings of the values, goals, and operating procedures of the veteran administration, treatment, and the justice system components.

Education and training programs help maintain a high level of professionalism, provide a forum for solidifying relationships among criminal justice, Veteran Administration, veteran volunteer mentors, and treatment personnel, and promote a spirit of commitment and collaboration.

KEY COMPONENT #10

Forging partnerships among Veterans Treatment Court, Veterans Administration, public agencies, and community-based organizations generates local support and enhances Veteran Treatment Court effectiveness

Because of its unique position in the criminal justice system, Veterans Treatment Court is well suited to develop coalitions among private community-based organizations, public criminal justice agencies, the Veteran Administration, veterans and veterans families support organizations, and AOD and mental health treatment delivery systems. Forming such coalitions expands the continuum of services available to Veterans Treatment Court participants and informs the community about Veterans Treatment Court concepts. The Veterans Treatment Court fosters system-wide involvement through its commitment to share responsibility and participation of program partners.