

**National Veterans' Technical Assistance Center (NVTAC)  
Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) Virtual Learning Courses (VLC)  
Session 3 of 4: Serving Individuals with Mental Health and Physical Health Challenges in  
HVRP  
May 9, 2023, 2 p.m. ET**

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## **Key Points**

- **Introduction**
  - NVTAC reminded the attendees that HVRP best practices will be shared during the session. NVTAC encourages all grantees to utilize best practices that may improve their service delivery. However, before implementing a practice discussed during this session, grantees must review their award statement of work and contact their Grant Officer Technical Representative (GOTR) to discuss whether it is an allowable cost or activity or requires an amendment to their approved plan.
  - **NVTAC Overview:** NVTAC provides individualized technical assistance (TA), training, peer-to-peer learning opportunities, and additional support to HVRP grantees. To contact NVTAC or request TA, reach out to [contact@nvtac.org](mailto:contact@nvtac.org).
- **Mental Health Challenges**
  - **Statistics:** As of 2019, 15.3 percent of U.S. veterans, 20.8 percent of adults experiencing homelessness, and 6.4 percent of U.S. adults experiencing unemployment have reported a mental health challenge. These statistics may be an underestimation because they rely primarily on self-reported data.
  - **Engagement and Outreach Strategies:** Ensuring staff properly trained in Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) is essential for all populations experiencing homelessness, but it is especially important for individuals with mental health challenges. Approaching mental health challenges with empathy and understanding is essential. Partnering with organizations who specialize in mental health is helpful for HVRP, including Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) and Projects for Assistance in Transitions from Homelessness (PATH). All HVRP staff should understand that employment services can be provided alongside mental health challenges. Mental health challenges are not exclusively referring to individuals with diagnosed mental illness, but rather anyone who is experiencing a challenge with their mental health.
  - **Case Management Strategies:** When applicable, HVRP staff can refer individuals with mental health challenges to counseling or other mental health support. If there are local organizations who participate in supportive employment, they may be a beneficial partner for HVRP. Supportive employment

is a model which helps participants obtain competitive work in the community and provides the support necessary to ensure they remain employed. For additional support, connect the veteran with U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and American Job Center (AJC) resources.

- **Job Development Techniques:** Assist the veteran with identifying transferrable skills from their military experience they can utilize in the civilian workforce. HVRP staff should be emphasizing skills rather than mental health challenges when discussing employment. Advocating for veterans, and equipping veterans to advocate for themselves, is essential as they plan to re-enter the workforce.
- **Physical Health Challenges**
  - **Statistics:** As of 2019, it was discovered that individuals experiencing homelessness experience higher rates of illness and mortality. On average, individuals experiencing homelessness die twelve year earlier than the general population. For individuals residing in a shelter, they experience disabilities at twice the rate of the general population on average. Diabetes, heart disease, and human immunodeficiency virus infection and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) are found in individuals experiencing homelessness at rates up to three to six times higher than the general population.
  - **Engagement and Outreach Strategies:** HVRP teams should be prepared to provide necessary accommodations for veterans with physical health challenges and understand that not all physical health challenges are visible. As often seen with mental health challenges, there is often stigma associated with physical health challenges and HVRP staff should be prepared to address that stigma. The notion that individuals with physical health challenges can be successful in the workplace should be consistently highlighted by HVRP staff.
  - **Case Management Strategies:** When possible, create ongoing partnerships with organizations who provide transportation services for individuals with physical health challenges or disabilities. Through case management, identify challenges the veteran may be faced with in the workplace and work together to identify possible solutions in advance. Utilize a strengths-based approach by identifying skills the veteran has that are not impacted by their physical health challenge.
  - **Job Development Techniques:** HVRP staff, partners, veterans, and employers should fully understand each element of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Target disability-friendly employers and identify accessible employment opportunities for veterans.
- **Discussion Questions**
  - **What challenges have you experienced reaching and serving veterans with mental health challenges?**
    - **Response:** It can become a repetitive cycle if the veteran experiences anxiety at work or lack of confidence to maintain employment due to their mental health challenges.

- **Response:** Sometimes, veterans will quit without giving a two-week notice and are difficult to get back in touch with.
  - **What best practices or innovative solutions have you utilized when serving veterans with mental health challenges?**
    - **Response:** Partnering with suicide-prevention programs who work with veterans at-risk of suicide to support the veteran before a crisis occurs.
    - **Response:** Partnering with the VA and utilizing compensated work therapy.
  - **What challenges have you experienced reaching and serving veterans with physical health challenges?**
    - **Response:** Veterans who are unable to perform manual labor due to their physical health challenges but have extensive experience in labor-intensive roles.
    - **Response:** Veterans with physical health challenges may need to pause employment efforts due to a surgery or other medical procedure.
  - **What best practices or innovative solutions have you utilized when serving veterans with physical health challenges?**
    - **Response:** Identifying skills from prior labor-intensive work and translating them to a role that's not labor-intensive.
    - **Response:** Visiting employers' on-site locations prior to placing a veteran with physical health challenges into employment to ensure that it is accessible.
    - **Response:** Maintaining a relationship with veterans who may need to take a break due to medical procedures so they can easily get started again when they are ready to do so.
- **Resources**
  - [Lack of Housing and Mental Health Disabilities Exacerbate One Another](#)
  - [Supported Employment: Building Your Program](#)
  - [Mental Health by the Numbers](#)
  - [The Never-Ending Loop: Homelessness, Psychiatric Disorder, and Mortality](#)
  - [Homelessness & Health: What's the Connection?](#)
  - [National Alliance to End Homelessness: Health](#)
  - [Healthcare and Homelessness](#)
  - [Understanding the Impact of Homelessness on Health and Wellbeing](#)

## Conclusion

Mental and physical health challenges may require additional support while re-entering the workforce, but they do not prevent success in the workplace. Through HVRP case management, referrals for additional services, and supportive employers, veterans experiencing mental and physical health challenges can maintain employment long-term.

This was the third of four VLC sessions within this series covering underserved populations. HVRP grantees can request individualized TA for their program at any time by emailing [contact@nvtac.org](mailto:contact@nvtac.org).

For more information, please visit [www.nvtac.org](http://www.nvtac.org).

*You can review the presentation through the following link: [NVTAC VLC May 2023: Serving Individuals with Mental Health and Physical Health Challenges in HVRP](#)*