

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/examining-the-barriers-to-employment-facing-justice-involved-veterans>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

The high unemployment rate among veterans who have been involved in the justice system has prompted legislative action (such as the Second Chance for Americas Veterans Act; H.R. 3467, 2007) and the development of programs within the Department of Veterans Affairs (such as the Office of Homelessness Veterans Justice Programs and Homeless Veteran Community Employment Services) to assist in returning these veterans to the workforce. In collaboration with these VA program offices, the [Center for Innovation to Implementation \(Ci2i\)](#) at the VA Palo Alto Health Care System conducted a [systematic review](#) to identify the employment needs of justice-involved veterans and the barriers that they face, as well as promising strategies and interventions that could be tested and implemented with this population.

This review found that many of these veterans face challenges due to a lack of education and work experience. Addressing these issues, in addition to improving job-readiness skills (such as preparing for job applications and interviews and discussing appropriate workplace behavior and attitudes), can lead to successful employment outcomes. Other competing needs that sometimes interfere with efforts to obtain or maintain employment may initially take priority over employment interventions and should, if possible, be addressed prior to job placement. These include mental health and substance abuse treatment; obstacles such as transportation or child care issues; securing official identification; and homelessness.

The delivery of employment-related services should be tailored to an individuals unique needs and characteristics; therefore, assessment of these needs is critical. An assessment can be specifically focused on employment needs or as part of a broader assessment that includes recidivism risk, given that the factors associated with recidivism and employability overlap considerably.

This review found evidence for effective employment-focused interventions for justice-involved adults that provide a basis for assisting justice-involved veterans. The most promising are those that address multiple barriers and needs and provide a range of support, while providing flexibility in the order and intensity of services provided. Such programs might include pre-employment preparation and job readiness training in conjunction with services to address competing needs such as mental health and substance use problems, homelessness, transportation, and child-care issues. In some cases, these services will be required before a justice-involved veteran begins to work, while in other cases, it may be possible and beneficial to begin paid work while simultaneously receiving support related to job readiness and other needs.

While existing research on job-placement into temporary or transitional jobs for justice-involved adults has not yielded significant long-term employment outcomes, certain components have shown promise. These include being engaged in a program for 30 days or more, job-readiness training, financial assistance for transportation, housing, food, or other needs, and incentive payments for maintaining work. The transitional job model which entails the provision of job training to enhance future employability and an opportunity to get into the habit of working, build an employment record, and show dependability and stability also shows promising results in the area of recidivism reduction. However, these results have not been consistent, and further research is necessary to determine what components of transitional job programs impact recidivism and how such programs may need to be adapted for veterans who have been involved in the justice system.

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