

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs



Guidebook for Re-entry Veterans in New York State

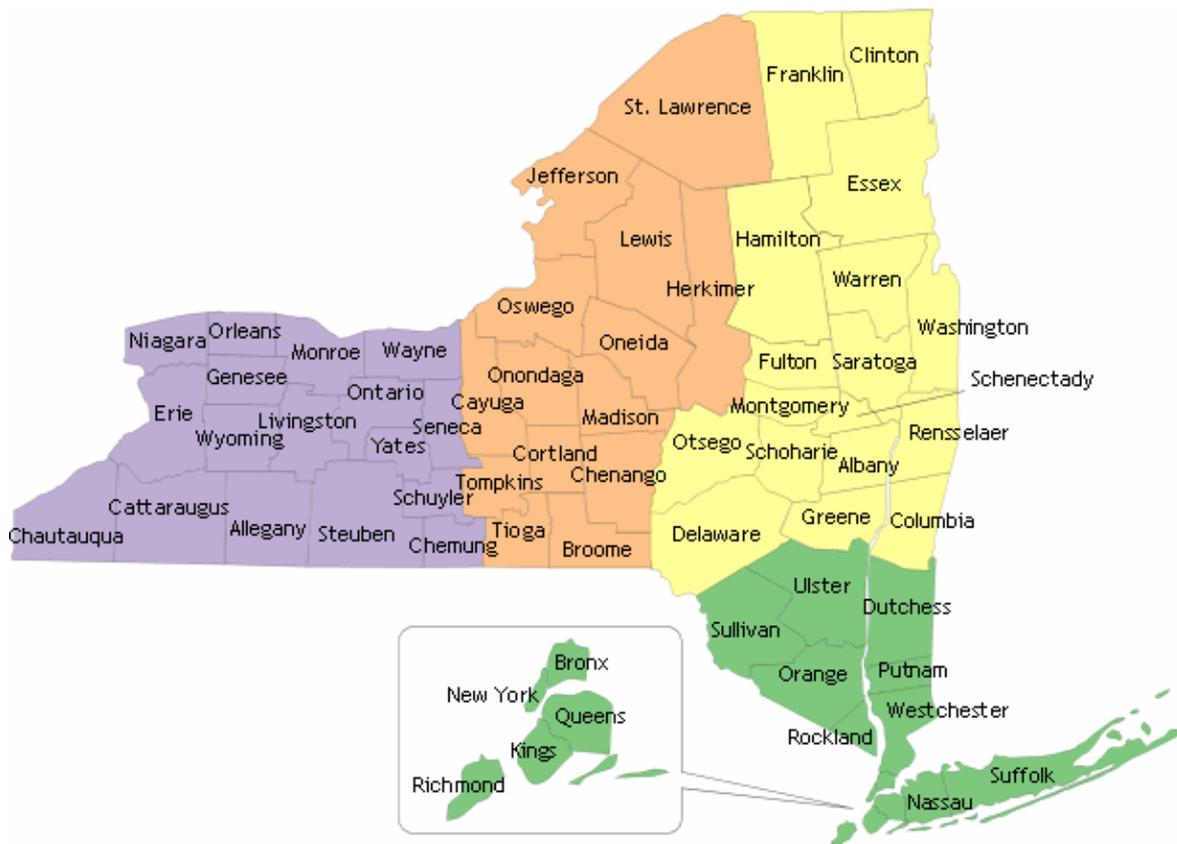


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FORWARD

Dear Veteran,

This guidebook can be an important tool as you plan your return to the community. The programs and resources described in this guidebook can help reduce some of the pressures you may encounter upon your release from incarceration. These pressures, such as difficulty gaining social acceptance, economic struggles, and temptations that may lead back to negative thinking and behavior, can be very intense. Our hope is that you will find at least one program or resource in the guidebook that will provide some relief as you face the challenges of finding and supporting a better way of life.

This guidebook is designed to assist veterans who have been incarcerated in the State of New York, as well as their families. Because laws and parole stipulations can vary from state to state, we advise you to check your plans and release requirements against this guide.

Thank you for your service to our country.

Sincerely,

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3. Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc. for developing the first Incarcerated Veterans Guidebook, which has inspired and informed subsequent efforts.
4. All public domain and agency resources included in this guidebook.

SECTION I: USING THIS GUIDE

This guide is for you to use to plan for your release and to keep as a reference after your release. It includes addresses, phone numbers and web sites that you can use to find out about programs and other available resources after your release. In case you do not have phone or internet access, please seek assistance from your assigned counselor, a friend or family member to help find the information you may need. Keep in mind that this guide does not include all of the services available, since resources in one area may be different from what is available in another. Therefore, be sure to check with local resources to learn about services in your area.

While incarcerated, begin inquiring about the department/unit responsible for helping you plan for your release (usually the Office of Guidance and Counseling). Take advantage of any classes or groups that are offered to work on your skills development so you can better prepare for life after release.

Begin thinking specifically about what you will need upon release. Ask yourself these kinds of questions: Will I need housing? Will I need medical, substance abuse, or mental health services? Do I need to learn a job skill? Do I have any other legal issues, such as child support? How do I restart my VA checks or Supplemental Security Income (SSI)?

Make a list of your needs. Remember that this is just a tool to help you get organized. A sample list might look like this:

- I need a place to live.
- I need a job.
- I need work clothes and tools.
- I want to get addictions treatment / counseling.
- I owe child support and/or have other legal matters.

Think about your list as you read this guide. Some questions you may want to ask yourself are, "Who do you think can help you with each of your needs? Is there one

organization that may be able to work with you on many different things or do you need to contact several agencies?" Keep track of the steps you take, including the dates and names of people you contact for information or assistance. Although this guide provides national and state addresses for many organizations, we recommend you check your phone book or the internet for local and county agencies that may have more information about the kind of help available in your area.

When writing a letter to request information, be as clear and direct as you can. Write legibly and keep your letter brief and concise. Include the following information:

- Your name and contact information
- A brief statement about your current situation
- Your specific request
- What you have done so far (*example: "I have written to _____ and they suggested I contact you."*)
- Any restrictions for mailings (*example: "Please do not send any mail with staples or paper clips because it will not be accepted by my prison facility."*)

When contacting an agency for help by mail, e-mail or phone, be persistent and polite. Ask questions if information is not clear to you. Remember that many organizations are staffed by volunteers who are eager to help but may not have the answers you are looking for. If someone cannot help you, ask if they know someone who can. In this way, you will obtain the best results.

The Internet can also be helpful to find information about VA benefits and community resources in your area. This guide includes web addresses when available. If computer access is not available at your facility, you can visit the public library after release. Computer access may also be available at Department of Labor One-Stop Career Centers and Affiliate sites. See page 17 for further information.

SECTION II: HELP FOR VETERANS

This section includes Veteran-specific as well as general resources that can help you get back on your feet. Some organizations and programs may have waiting lists, require an interview, or have specific rules about whom they serve. It is a good idea to start asking about services and requirements now, so that you will be prepared when released. In some cases, you may be able to ask if your name can be placed on a waiting list, as you get closer to your release date. Remember to check the phone book and the internet for additional local, county and state agencies that are available in your area to assist you.

GETTING STARTED

Your post-release success depends upon steps you take while still incarcerated. Working in partnership with the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) staff and/or your facility Offender Rehabilitation Coordinator to develop a re-entry plan can go a long way to reduce some of the challenges you may face after you leave the Corrections system. The resources in this book will be more useful if used in partnership with the resources that are also offered by DOCCS.

RE-ENTRY TIMELINE CHECKLIST:

- Request to be placed on the VA call out through your facility Veteran Liaison when you are within 1 year of your conditional release or max out date.
- Ask questions
- If you are interested in receiving information about VA services, please speak to your VA Liaison to be placed on the VA call out.
- Contact the Re-Entry Specialist for your respective facility upon release. The contact information is found on page 8.

The VA Health Care for Re-entry Veterans (HCRV) Program

In addition to working with DOCCS and Parole, the Department of Veterans Affairs provides outreach and re-entry planning to eligible Veterans who are within six months of release from incarceration through the Health Care for Re-entry Veterans (HCRV) program. The goals of the program are to educate incarcerated Veterans about VA services and benefits, to optimize Veterans' chances for success in the community through comprehensive transition planning, and to provide post-release supportive case management. The HCRV Program Specialist works with DOCCS to identify Veterans in the Corrections system and makes site visits to facilities to meet individually with Veterans preparing for release. The Specialist also works closely with DOCCS and Community Supervision staff to develop transition plans for Veterans based on their needs and services available by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Transition plans typically include assistance with housing, employment or other income supports, as well as treatment services for medical, mental health and substance abuse problems.

The three Department of Veterans Affairs HCRV Program Specialists who conduct outreach to re-entry veterans in the State of New York:

For Upstate New York:

Upper Hudson Valley: Albany, Utica,
Syracuse, Watertown and Adirondack
Region

Jonathan Pollack, LCSW-R, MPA

VA Upstate NY Healthcare System (VISN2)
113 Holland Avenue, Building 67
Albany, NY 12208
(518) 626-7349
Fax: (518) 626-5556

For Western New York:

Binghamton, Finger Lakes Region,
Rochester, Buffalo and Niagara Region

Cynthia Thayer, LSW, LMSW

VA Western NY Healthcare System (VISN2)
400 Fort Hill Avenue
Canandaigua, NY 14424
(585) 393-8081
Fax: (585) 393-7629

For Downstate New York:

Lower Hudson Valley, New York City
and Long Island

Valerie Johnson, SST

VA Hudson Valley Health Care System (VISN3)
P.O. Box 100, Albany Post Road
Bldg. 52 (620-181)
Montrose, NY 10548
(914) 737-4400 x3739
Fax: (914) 788-4397

Veterans will typically work with the HCRV Specialist in the correctional facility and provide appropriate referrals to the veterans returning area. For example, if your county of release will be Nassau on Long Island you would work with the Downstate New York HCRV Specialist on a re-entry plan.

If you are within six months of release, the best way to get in contact with an HCRV Specialist is to complete a **VA Health Care for Re-entry Veterans Services Referral Form.** Your facility Offender Rehabilitation Coordinator has copies of this form. The instructions are below:

1. Complete the top half of the form.
2. Ask your facility Offender Rehabilitation Coordinator to complete the bottom half of the form.
3. Your facility Offender Rehabilitation Coordinator will fax the form to the appropriate HCRV Specialist.
4. The HCRV Specialist will arrange for you to be part of a call-out on his/her next visit to your facility.

HEALTH CARE

Eligibility for VA Health Care:

Most but not all people who served in the military are eligible for VA health care services. Laws set forth by the U.S. Congress determine eligibility requirements. Every VA medical center has eligibility specialists that review veterans' military service records for things such as type of discharge and length of time on active duty to determine eligibility. Please note that you cannot receive VA healthcare services other than compensation exams while incarcerated. If you are still incarcerated the VA Health Care for Re-entry Veterans Program Specialist can help determine your VA health care eligibility and register you for VA health care in anticipation of your release. If you have been released, we encourage you to enroll in the VA health care system as soon as possible. Please see the veterans' benefits section on page 23.

Two Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISN's) within the VA system cover the State of New York. VISN 2 covers Upstate and Western New York, and VISN 3 covers Downstate New York (Hudson Valley, New York City and Long Island).

Below we have listed the VA medical centers and community based outpatient clinics by network area:

VISN 2: Upstate New York

Medical Centers	Albany VA Medical Center	Syracuse VA Medical Center
	113 Holland Avenue	800 Irving Avenue
	Albany, NY 12208	Syracuse, NY 13210
	(518) 626-5000	(315) 425-4400
	Batavia VA Medical Center	Bath VA Medical Center
	222 Richmond Avenue	76 Veterans Avenue
	Batavia, NY 14020	Bath, NY 14810
	(585) 297-1000	(607) 664-4000
	Buffalo VA Medical Center	Canandaigua VA Medical Center
	3495 Bailey Avenue	400 Fort Hill Avenue
	Buffalo, NY 14215	Canandaigua, NY 14424
	(716) 834-9200	(585) 394-2000
Community Based	Carthage	Catskill
Outpatient Clinics*	Clifton Park	Elizabethtown
	Fonda	Glens Falls
	Kingston	Malone
	Massena	Oswego
	Plattsburgh	Rome
	Schenectady	Troy
	Auburn	Binghamton
	Cortland	Dunkirk
	Elmira	Ithaca
	Jamestown	Lackawanna
	Lockport	Niagara Falls
	Olean	Rochester
	Warsaw	Wellsville

VISN 3: Downstate New York

Medical Centers

Brooklyn VA Medical Center

800 Poly Place
Brooklyn, NY 11209
(718) 836-6600

Bronx VA Medical Center

130 West Kingsbridge Road
Bronx, New York 10468
(718) 584-9000

Castle Point VA Medical Center

Route 9D
Castle Point, NY 12511
(845) 831-2000

Manhattan VA Medical Center

423 East 23 Street
New York, NY 10010
(212) 686-7500

Montrose VA Medical Center

2094 Albany Post Road, Rt. 9A
Montrose, NY 10548
(914) 737-4400

Northport VA Medical Center

79 Middleville Road
Northport, New York 11768
(631) 261-4400

St. Albans VA Community Living Center

179-00 Linden Blvd.
Jamaica, NY 11425
(718) 526-1000

Community

Based Outpatient

Clinics*

Bronx
Carmel
Monticello
New York (Harlem)
Patchogue
Plainview
Poughkeepsie
Sunnyside
White Plains

Brooklyn (Chapel Street)
Goshen
New City
New York (16th St. Opiate Repl.)
Pine Plains
Riverhead
Port Jervis
Staten Island
Westhampton
Yonkers

* For addresses and phone numbers of VA Community Based Outpatient Clinics, please contact one of the VA medical centers or go to <http://www2.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp>

Special Health Information for Veterans:

Veterans, homeless, and incarcerated people are at high risk for **Hepatitis C (HCV)**, a serious disease that can cause cirrhosis (scarring of the liver) and liver cancer. You are at risk if:

- you ever used a needle to inject drugs;
- you had a blood transfusion or organ transplant before 1992;
- you were a health care worker and had contact with blood;
- you were on long-term kidney dialysis;
- Your mother had Hepatitis C when she gave birth to you.

The Veterans Health Administration also recommends testing if:

- you are a Vietnam-era veteran;
- you have had exposure to blood on your skin;
- you have had multiple sex partners;
- you have tattoos or body piercings;
- you have ever snorted cocaine;
- you have liver disease;
- you have a history of drinking a lot of alcohol;
- You have had an abnormal liver function test.

If you are eligible for VA services and may be at risk, contact the nearest VA Medical Center after your release to be tested and seek HCV counseling.

General Health Care Services:

If you are ineligible for VA health care, free or low-cost health care may be available from the following sources:

1. **The New York State Department of Health (DOH)** can help you obtain health care if you are uninsured. Check the web at www.health.state.ny.us. You can also call the Medicaid Helpline. In New York City, call (718) 557-1399. Outside the five boroughs of New York City call (877) 472-8411.

2. **National Health Care for the Homeless Council** has a list of health care providers working with homeless people across the nation. For a list of providers in your state, go to www.nhchc.org.
3. **Many local organizations and communities run free clinics.** Look in the phone book blue pages under "Public Health" to contact local government offices for clinics in your area.

HOUSING

One of the first and most important steps in returning to the community is finding a place to live. This section describes various types of housing resources such as emergency shelter, transitional housing programs, permanent housing assistance as well as how to access each. Please note that you may be eligible for some VA housing programs without being eligible for VA healthcare services.

Emergency Housing and Shelter

The best situation is to never need emergency shelter and work closely with the DOCCS counseling staff and your offender rehabilitation coordinator (as well as the HCRV Program Specialist if you are eligible for VA services) as you make a community re-entry plan. If you do need emergency shelter, you can find it several ways:

1. Look in the **local yellow pages** under "Mission" or "Shelter." You can also look in the front of the phone book under local, city, or county government Department of Social Services or "Human Services," or call the County Commissioner's Office for information about local low-income housing coalitions or homeless advocacy groups who may know what is available.
2. Use the **First Step web site** which provides a wealth of information on housing and income assistance, food, employment services, child care, mental health and counseling services, health care assistance, alcohol and drug abuse treatment, life skills and HIV/AIDS services. Go to www.cms.hhs.gov/apps/firststep/index.html.
3. Check the **Department of Housing and Urban Development** online to find a list of emergency shelters for men, women and families in every state at www.hud.gov/homeless/hmlsagen.cfm.

4. **National Coalition for the Homeless** has a directory of shelters and homeless assistance programs online. It does not list every program in the country, so be sure to check your phone book for local programs. Call 1-800-838-4357 or go to www.nchv.org.
5. Check your **County Department of Social Services**. Most provide help securing emergency assistance, including shelter, public assistance, food stamps and other referrals. We have included a list of county offices in New York State in Section IV (Resources) of this guide.
6. VA Contract Residential Programs provide short-term residential housing. The VA Contract Residential program Social Worker can be contacted upon your release. If you are in a crisis, you may contact the Veterans Crisis Hotline at 1-800-273-8255 for immediate assistance.

Residential Treatment Programs and Transitional Housing

Transitional or temporary housing can help you adjust to living in the community while you work toward full independence after your release. There are often waiting lists for transitional housing assistance programs, however, so you should ask about applying as soon as possible. A few possible options include:

1. **VA's Domiciliary Care for Homeless Veterans (DCHV) Program**. These residential programs provide medical, mental health and substance abuse treatment and rehabilitation to eligible homeless Veterans. Domiciliaries are residential treatment programs and not transitional housing, but can be an important resource for Veterans returning to the community who need support. A typical Domiciliary stay lasts for approximately 3 - 4 months. In New York State there are Domiciliary programs located in Canandaigua (Finger Lakes region), Bath (Southern Tier), Montrose (Hudson Valley region), and St. Albans (Queens). Each Domiciliary program is unique, and the HCRV Program Specialist can help you determine which program is right for your needs. The Domiciliary is also an entry point for other VA transitional housing programs. To be screened for the Domiciliary program, contact the HCRV Program Specialist (see pages 7 - 9 for more details).

2. **VA Grant & Per Diem Programs.** These programs are operated by community-based transitional housing providers using funding from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Programs provide residential and supportive services to homeless Veterans for up to 24 months. Each program and associated housing facility is unique and has its own screening and admission criteria. For more information about these programs, contact the HCRV Program Specialist (see pages 7 - 9 for more details).
3. **Oxford Houses.** This non-profit organization started in 1975. Today there are over 950 Oxford Houses throughout the country. An Oxford House is a self-governed and self-supported recovery house for people who seek sobriety. The house members are responsible for all household expenses, and any member who uses alcohol or drugs is immediately expelled. These are nice homes in nice neighborhoods. To locate an Oxford house, call the 24-hour helpline at (800) 689-6411. Oxford Houses in New York State can be located on the web at www.oxfordhouse.org

Long-term or Permanent Housing

Permanent housing may be challenging to find immediately after your release, especially if you are trying to put other aspects of your life in order such as finding a job and getting a stable income. It is still worthwhile to explore your options, however, so here are a few possible resources:

1. **Public housing** waiting lists can be long, but the length of time can vary from county to county. Even if you are not sure where you want to live yet, apply to get on a waiting list so that you can have as many options as possible. To learn how to apply, contact the local housing authority listed in the phone book blue pages under "Local Government, Public Housing Authority."
2. The **VA HUD-VASH Program** is a collaboration between the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Supported Housing (VASH) program to help homeless Veterans and their immediate families find and maintain affordable, safe, and permanent housing in the community. The primary goal of HUD-VASH is to help Veterans and their families successfully move out of homelessness using HUD Section 8 "Housing Choice" rental assistance vouchers and VA's intensive case management

services. The program is designed to improve each Veteran's physical and mental health, and to enhance each Veteran's ability to remain stable, housed, and integrated in their local community. Veterans work with a VA case manager for assessment, service planning, help with obtaining the Section 8 voucher, and housing placement. Veterans continue to work with their assigned case manager for the duration of their time in the program. To be screened for the HUD-VASH program, contact the HCRV Program Specialist (see pages 7 - 9 for more details). NOTE: Veterans and immediate family members subject to a lifetime registration requirement under a state sex offender registration program are not eligible for HUD-VASH because they will not be able to obtain a Section 8 housing voucher.

Things to remember regarding housing:

If you will be under **parole supervision** after your release, there are a few important points to remember:

- A. At the very least, you will need some kind of semi-permanent housing arrangement in order to be paroled. This could mean living with family or in transitional housing that you may be able to arrange while you are incarcerated. Transitional housing can provide you with a place to live while you are finding employment and/or saving for your own apartment.
- B. As a health care organization, the Department of Veterans Affairs is unable to provide letters of reasonable assurance to veteran inmates.
- C. Your parole officer will be looking for you to establish some kind of stable permanent residence in your first three months after release.
- D. After you are released, DO NOT MOVE without notifying your parole officer. DO NOT move outside the county or state without his/her advance permission. Moving out of state requires written permission in advance, usually from both your initial parole officer and from the parole officer in the state you are moving to.

EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE

Many people feel like they are completely starting over after their release from incarceration, even if they had good jobs and worked steadily in the past. It is important to begin preparing for job opportunities while incarcerated so you can begin working as soon as possible after your release. Having a stable income from work is important for housing and other necessities and can smooth your transition to the community. You should ask for job counseling and training while you are still incarcerated and take advantage of any educational or employment preparation activities being offered at your facility.

In addition, the following resources may be helpful to you:

1. The **Department of Labor's (DOL) One-Stop Career Centers** offer the convenience of one-stop shopping for your employment and training needs. One-Stop Career Centers offer a variety of job finding resources in one place such as internet access to thousands of job listings in New York and nationwide, computerized job matching and direct referral to job opportunities, career counseling and job search workshops, assistance writing and publicizing resumes, and assistance accessing training and/or retraining resources. There are about 95 One-Stop Centers and affiliates located in New York. A listing of New York centers is available on the web at www.servicelocator.org.
2. The **New York State Department of Labor** offers Veterans specific resources including career assessment, referral to jobs, contacting employers, resume preparation assistance, information on federal, state, and local civil service opportunities, job search planning, labor market information, and referral to other agencies that provide services to Veterans. To contact a Veterans Employment Representative in your area call (800) 342-3358, or go to: www.labor.state.ny.us/VETs/VETINTROPAGE.shtm
3. **VA Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment** services help Veterans with service-connected disabilities by providing job training and counseling to those who have an employment handicap. Services include help finding a job, on-the-job training, job development, and vocational training. VA vocational rehabilitation counselors can also help Veterans find other options or programs

depending upon their needs. Contact your VA Regional Office (VARO) at 1-800-827-1000, or go to www.vba.va.gov.

4. The **VA Veterans Industries and Compensated Work Therapy** programs offer structured work opportunities for at-risk and homeless Veterans with physical, mental health and addiction problems. Please note that you must be eligible for VA healthcare services for this program. VA contracts with private industry and the public sector for work by veterans in the program who in turn learn job skills, re-learn successful work habits, and regain a sense of self-esteem. Veterans are paid for their work and given assistance with finding employment in the community. If you would like to be screened for this program, please contact the HCRV Program Specialist (see pages 7 - 9 for more details).

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

If you are eligible for VA Health Care:

The **Department of Veterans Affairs** provides a full range of inpatient, outpatient and residential treatment for Veterans with mental health and substance abuse concerns. This includes help for issues like depression, anxiety, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and Military Sexual Trauma (MST), as well as illnesses like Bi-Polar Disorder and Schizophrenia. This includes opiate substitution (methadone) treatment. There are also specialized services for veterans who served during Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (Iraq).

If you are currently incarcerated the Health Care for Re-entry Veterans (HCRV) Program Specialist can speak with you in more detail about available programs and services that can meet your specific needs. (See page 8 for information on how to contact the HCRV Program Specialist in your area).

If you have been released, please contact your local VA medical center found on pages 10-11.

SPECIAL NOTE: If at any time after your release from incarceration you are in a crisis, a national toll-free **Veterans Crisis Hotline** is available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. Please call **(800) 273-TALK**.

In addition, **Vet Centers** provide readjustment counseling and outreach services to all veterans who served in any combat zone, and to any veteran who was sexually traumatized (regardless of gender or era of service) while serving in the military. Services are also available for their family members for military related issues. Veterans have earned these benefits through their service and all are provided at no cost to the veteran or family. The 232 community based Vet Centers are located in all fifty states, District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands. In the state of New York, the Vet Centers are located at the following locations:

Albany Vet Center 17 Computer Drive West Albany, NY 12205 Phone: 518-626-5130	Babylon Vet Center 116 West Main St. Babylon, NY 11702 Phone: 631-661-3930	Binghamton Vet Center 53 Chenango Street Binghamton, NY 13901 Phone: 866-716-8213
Bronx Vet Center 2471 Morris Ave., Suite 1A Bronx, NY 10468 Phone: 718-367-3500	Brooklyn Vet Center 25 Chapel St. Suite 604 Brooklyn, NY 11201 Phone: 718-624-2765	Buffalo Vet Center 2372 Sweet Home Road, Suite1 Buffalo, NY 14228 Phone: 716- 862-7350 or Phone: 1-877-927-8387
Harlem Vet Center 2279 - 3rd Avenue, 2nd Floor New York, NY 10035 Phone: 212-426-2200	Manhattan Vet Center 32 Broadway, 2nd Floor Suite 200 New York, NY 10004 Phone: 212-742-9591	Middletown Vet Center 726 East Main Street Suite 203 Middletown, NY 10940 Phone: 845-342-9917
Queens Vet Center 75-10B 91 Ave. Woodhaven, NY 11421 Phone: 718-296-2871	Rochester Vet Center 2000 S. Winton Road Rochester, NY 14618 Phone: 585-232-5040	Staten Island Vet Center 150 Richmond Terrace Staten Island, NY 10301 Phone: 718-816-4499
Syracuse Vet Center 109 Pine Street, Suite 101 Syracuse, NY 13210 Phone: 315- 478-7127	Watertown Vet Center 210 Court Street Watertown, NY 13601 Phone: 315-782-0217	White Plains Vet Center 300 Hamilton Ave. 1st floor White Plains, NY 10601 Phone: 914-682-6250

General Mental Health Services:

The following sources may be able to tell you where you can go to get help:

1. **National Alliance for the Mentally Ill** lists community mental health services providers at www.nami.org or call (800)950-6264.
2. **National Mental Health Association** offers support groups, rehabilitation, socialization, and housing services through 340 community organizations located across the country. Call (800) 969-NMHA, or find a local office online at www.nmha.org

SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT

If you have a history of abusing alcohol or drugs prior to your incarceration, you may want to seriously consider some type of treatment after your release even if many years have passed since the last time you drank or abused substances. Many people who have been clean and sober because of incarceration often face challenges staying that way when they return to their communities. We strongly recommend receiving substance abuse treatment to help you avoid temptations and stay on a positive path to achieve your goals after your release.

General Substance Abuse Services:

The following sources may be able to tell you where you can go to get help:

1. The New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) has a **HOPEline** offering help and hope 24-hours a day, 365 days a year for alcoholism, drug abuse and problem gambling. All calls are toll-free, anonymous and confidential. Call: (877) 8-HOPENY.
2. **Focus On Recovery Helpline** - A 24-hour national alcohol and drug abuse addiction and treatment hotline: (800) 888-9383.
3. **Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous** are 12-step recovery programs offering free support meetings throughout the state. Go to www.AA.org or www.NA.org to locate a meeting near you.

WOMEN VETERANS

The **Women Veterans Health Care Program** is an integral part of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Health Administration. The program goals are to present diverse and innovative programs that care for, educate, and support women Veterans during all phases of their lives. The program focus is on the unique needs and issues facing women Veterans including health promotion, disease prevention and management, and emotional well-being. In addition, support and therapy groups for women who have suffered military sexual trauma are available. There is a **Women Veterans Program Manager** at each VA medical center who coordinates services for women Veterans. Please contact your local VA Medical center for further information regarding the Women's Veteran Program.

LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Most law is state-specific, and the law in the state where you live or where the problem occurred governs most common legal problems. When looking for legal help, make sure that information you find applies to your state, or that the lawyer or other service provider is qualified to work in your state.

1. The **American Bar Association** has a web site with guidelines about free legal services and links to directories of legal aid offices and pro-bono programs. Go to: www.abanet.org
2. **LawHelp / NY** is an on-line tool for helping low-income New Yorkers solve their legal problems. It is the only comprehensive source of legal referral information in the state and includes free legal service projects and organizations with their contact and intake information, Know Your Rights and self-help resources covering 15 areas of law, extensive links to social service, advocacy and government organizations, information about the Court system, and a Spanish mirror website and legal rights resources in more than 30 languages. Go to: www.lawhelp.org/ny
3. **The New York State Division of Child Support Enforcement** has a website that assists parents with child support information and requirements, including online videos. Go to www.newyorkchildsupport.com. In addition, the Department of Veterans Affairs has formed a partnership with the New York State Division of Child Support Enforcement to help low-income Veterans to find out if they owe child support and make restitution, (repayment) based on ability to pay. You can speak with the Health Care for Re-entry Veterans (HCRV) Program Specialist if you have concerns about child support. (See pages 7 - 9 for more information on how to contact the HCRV Program Specialist.)

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

1. If you are unemployed with little or no income, you may be able to receive welfare and food stamps from your **County Department of Social Services**. We have included a list of county offices in New York State in Appendix II of this guide.

2. If you are disabled and know you will not be able to return to work in any capacity, you can apply for **Supplemental Security Income (SSI)** benefits from the Social Security Administration before your release, even though you will not receive the benefits until after you are released. Generally, applications for Food Stamps can be requested together with SSI. Normally it takes about three months to review an application, so apply well before your release date. If you have any questions regarding filling out the application, please contact the following:

- 1- (800) 772-1213
- Check the phone book blue pages for your local Social Security Administration office
- Go to: <http://www.ssa.gov/notices/supplemental-security-income/>

SECTION III: VBA BENEFITS & ENTITLEMENTS

This section applies to veterans who are currently receiving VA disability benefits. If you want to apply for VA benefits, please refer to the “Financial Assistance” section, pages 21-22.

VETERAN BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION

If you are disabled due to your military service or disabled and served during a period of combat, you can apply for **VA Service Connected Compensation** from the Veterans Benefits Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs. In addition, the Department of Veterans Affairs publishes a booklet called “Federal Benefits for Veterans and Their Dependents” that describes the types of benefits available and lists the addresses and phone numbers for VA facilities nationwide. For detailed information or assistance, please contact the Department of Veterans Affairs Regional office via phone or mail. The contact information is found below:

- Regional Office Toll Free Number 1-(800) 827-1000 or write to:

Department of Veterans Affairs Regional Office 130 South Elmwood Avenue Buffalo, NY 14202	Department of Veterans Affairs Regional Office 245 West Houston Street New York, NY 10014
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- VBA website: www.vba.va.gov
- Please note, Re-Entry Specialists cannot award financial benefits. The Regional Benefits Office listed above addresses these types of matters. If further assistance is needed, please write your appropriate Re-Entry Specialist.

BENEFITS PAYMENTS WHILE INCARCERATED

There is a 60-day "grace period" following a conviction to receive full benefits. To avoid an overpayment, it is important that you notify the VA Regional Office in writing (VARO) immediately upon conviction if you are receiving payments. If you do not notify the VBA (Veterans Benefits Administration) and receive overpayment, you and your family will lose all financial payments until the debt is paid. The VA considers it to be the

Veteran's responsibility and fault if this occurs because the Veteran failed to notify the VA of his or her incarceration. Attempts to obtain a waiver in these situations of overpayment are often unsuccessful.

For example, *Joe is a Veteran who receives a VA pension. He commits a crime, is convicted and incarcerated, but does not tell the VA right away and keeps getting paid for 6 months. After serving his sentence of 18 months, he is released and applies to the VA to have his pension reinstated. He will have an overpayment that must be recovered from the reinstated benefits. Until the overpayment is recovered by the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), Joe's VA pension will be suspended until the debt is paid in full.*

APPORTIONMENT -VBA

Legally a Veteran can only receive a portion of the full amount payable for his or her disability rating while incarcerated, but the remaining balance may be "apportioned to the individual's dependent family". This means your dependant family members (spouse, children, or dependent parents) may be able to receive part of your benefits while you are incarcerated. VA regulations clearly specify an apportionment amount will only go to family members if they can show financial need.

To apply for apportionment, you must send a letter to the VA Regional Office (VARO) that identifies yourself as the Veteran and your spouse, children and/or parent as dependents. You must clearly state that you are requesting an apportionment of your VA benefits.

In deciding whether any apportionment is appropriate, the amount of the apportionment, and to whom it will go, the following factors are considered:

- The family member's income and living expenses;
- The amount of compensation available to be apportioned;
- The needs and living expenses of other family members; and
- Special needs of any of the family members.

For example, *Tom is rated as 80 percent disability (80% service connected). While incarcerated he can only receive the amount he would get if he was 10 percent disabled (10% service connected). However, his family may be apportioned up to 70 percent,*

the difference of the 80 percent rating. (80% service connected minus 10% service connected = 70% service connected. The 70% goes to Tom's family.)

There is a 60-day "grace period" following conviction where the Veteran or dependent family members (also called Dependency or Indemnity Compensation (DIC) recipients) may still receive full benefits. If the Veteran continues to receive benefits after the 60-day period, it will result in an overpayment. The VA considers it to be the Veteran's responsibility and fault if this occurs because the Veteran failed to notify the VA of his or her incarceration. Attempts to obtain a waiver in these situations of overpayment are often unsuccessful. As a rule, the veteran loses most, if not all, financial benefits until the VA recovers the entire overpayment. It has also been a standard procedure that the family will not be entitled to receive an apportionment until the debt is completely recovered.

It is important to remember that most VBA decisions, including those on apportionment, can be appealed to the Board of Veterans Appeals and, if need be, to the Court of Appeal for Veterans Affairs.

RE-STARTING BENEFITS AT RELEASE

The VBA needs formal notification from the prison of your release in order to re-start benefits. This means you need to take your release papers from prison to the VBA Regional Office in person. The sooner documentation is provided to the VBA, the sooner the VBA can begin to process your request.

Alternatively, you can complete Form 21-4193 (Notice to Department of Veterans Affairs of Veteran or Beneficiary Incarcerated in Penal Institution) before your release, have it signed by a prison official and submitted to the VA Regional Office.

SEEKING FINANCIAL BENEFITS AFTER RELEASE

If you would like to get benefits or if you think you have a pending claim before the VA, it is best to get professional help to assist you.

1. Many Veterans Service Organizations (VSO's) have trained staff who can help you with your VA claim, and can legally represent your claim before the VA. The following are some VSO's in the state of New York:

AMVETS	(716) 857-3350 or (716) 857-3485
American Legion	Buffalo: (716) 857-3361 New York: (212) 807-3066
Catholic War Veterans	(212) 962-0988
Disabled American Veterans	(516) 877-7100
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America	(212) 982-9699 www.iava.org
Paralyzed Veterans of America	Bronx: (718) 584-9000 x6272 Buffalo: (716) 857-3353 New York: (212) 807-3114 Syracuse: (315) 478-1392
Military Order of the Purple Heart	(888) 668-1656 www.purpleheart.org
New York State Division of Veterans Affairs	(888) VETS-NYS
Veterans of Foreign Wars	Buffalo: (716) 857-3348 / 3349 New York: (212) 807-3164
Vietnam Veterans of America	(800) VVA-1316 www.vva.org

2. The Department of Veterans Affairs has an online [Directory of Veterans Service Organizations](#) with additional listings:

<http://www1.va.gov/vso/index.cfm>

Although we encourage you to seek the aid of a service representative, you may choose to apply for VBA benefits on your own:

- Write the VARO or find the forms online at: www.va.gov/vaforms
- You can also apply for certain benefits online at:
<http://vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/main.asp>

DISCHARGE UPGRADES

If you are not eligible for VA benefits and services because of the character of your military discharge (such as “Dishonorable” or “Bad Conduct”, you can consider applying for a discharge upgrade from the Military Discharge Review Board. Here are a few important points:

1. Because of the time consuming nature of the discharge upgrade process and the need to collect documentation, we **STRONGLY** suggest you wait until after your release before applying for a discharge upgrade.
2. If / when you do undertake an application, we **STRONGLY** urge you to get help with the process. We suggest you contact a **Veterans Service Organization**, the **New York State Division of Veterans Affairs** at (888) VETS-NYS, or go to: <http://veterans.state.ny.us/index.html>.
3. The **American Legion** has developed a Guide to Filing Military Discharge Review Board and Board for Correction of Military Records Applications that gives a good overview of the application process, suggestions and information about what to expect. It is available online at: <http://www.legion.org/documents/legion/pdf/dodguide.pdf>

Section IV: RESOURCES

APPENDIX 1

NEW YORK STATE - COUNTY DEPARTMENTS OF SOCIAL SERVICES

Albany County DSS, 162 Washington Avenue, Albany, New York 12210, (518) 447-7492

Allegany County DSS, 7 Court St., Belmont, New York 14813-1077, (585) 268-9622

Broome County DSS, 36-42 Main Street, Binghamton, New York 13905-3199, (607) 778-8850

Cattaraugus County DSS, Cattaraugus County Building, 1701 Lincoln Avenue Suite 6010, Olean, New York 14760-1158, (716) 373-8065

Cayuga County DSS, County Office Building, 160 Genesee Street, Auburn, New York 13021-3433, (315) 253-1011

Chautauqua County DSS, Hall R. Clothier Building, Mayville, New York 14757, (716) 753-4421

Chemung County DSS, Human Resource Center, 425 Pennsylvania Ave PO Box 588, Elmira, New York 14902, (607) 737-5302

Chenango County DSS, PO Box 590, Court Street, Norwich, New York 13815, (607) 337-1500

Clinton County DSS, 13 Durkee Street, Plattsburgh, New York 12901-2911, (518) 565-3300

Columbia County DSS, 25 Railroad Avenue, PO Box 458, Hudson, New York 12534, (518) 828-9411/12

Cortland County DSS, 60 Central Avenue, Cortland, New York 13045-5590, (607) 753-5248

Delaware County DSS, 111 Main Street, Delhi, New York 13753, (607) 746-2325

Dutchess County DSS, 60 Market Street, Poughkeepsie, New York 12601-3299, (845) 486-3000

Erie County DSS, 95 Franklin Street, Buffalo, New York 14202-3959, (716) 858-8000

Essex County DSS, 7551 Court Street, PO Box 217, Elizabethtown, New York 12932-0217, (518) 873-3441

Franklin County DSS, 355 W. Main St., Malone, New York 12953, (518) 483-6770

Fulton County DSS, 4 Daisy Lane, PO Box 549, Johnstown, New York 12095, (518) 736-5600

Genesee County DSS, 5130 East Main Street, Suite #3, Batavia, New York 14020, (585) 344-2580

Greene County DSS, 411 Main Street, PO Box 528, Catskill, New York 12414-1716, (518) 943-3200

Hamilton County DSS, PO Box 725, White Birch Lane, Indian Lake, New York 12842-0725, (518) 648-6131

Herkimer County DSS, 301 North Washington Street, Suite 2110, Herkimer, New York 13350, (315) 867-1291

Jefferson County DSS, 250 Arsenal Street, Watertown, New York 13601, (315) 782-9030

Lewis County DSS, PO Box 193, Lowville, New York 13367, (315) 376-5400

Livingston County DSS, 3 Livingston County Campus, Mt. Morris, New York 14510-1699, (585) 243-7300

Madison County DSS, PO Box 637, North Court Street, Wampsville, New York 13163, (315) 366-2211

Monroe County DSS, 111 Westfall Road, Rochester, New York 14620-4686, (585) 274-6000

Montgomery County DSS, County Office Building, PO Box 745, Fonda, New York 12068, (518) 853-4646

Nassau County DSS, 60 Charles Lindbergh blvd., Uniondale, New York 11553-3656, (516) 227-7474

New York City Human Resources Administration, (718) 557-1399 or (877) 472-8411 (Toll free within the five boroughs of New York City.)

Niagara County DSS, 20 East Avenue, PO Box 506, Lockport, New York 14095-0506, (716) 439-7600

Oneida County DSS, 800 Park Avenue, Utica, New York 13501-2981, (315) 798-5632

Onondaga County DSS, 421 Montgomery Street, Syracuse, New York 13202-2923, (315) 435-2928

Ontario County DSS, 3010 County Complex Drive, Canandaigua, New York 14424-1296, 1(877) 814-6907 for outside the County area (585) 396-4060

Orange County DSS, Box Z, 11 Quarry Road, Goshen, New York 10924-0678, (845) 291-4000

Orleans County DSS, 14016 Route 31 West, Albion, New York 14411-9365, (585) 589-7000

Oswego County DSS, 100 Spring Street, PO Box 1320, Mexico, New York 13114, (315) 963-5000

Otsego County DSS, County Office Building, 197 Main Street, Cooperstown, New York 13326-1196, (607) 547-1700

Putnam County DSS, 110 Old Route Six Center, Carmel, New York 10512-2110, (845) 225-7040

Rensselaer County DSS, 133 Bloomingrove Drive, Troy, New York 12180-8403, (518) 283-2000

Rockland County DSS, Building L, Sanatorium Road, Pomona, New York 10970, (845) 364-3040

Saratoga County DSS, 152 West High Street, Ballston Spa, New York 12020, (518) 884-4148

Schenectady County DSS, 487 Nott Street, Schenectady, New York 12308-1812, (518) 388-4470

Schoharie County DSS, County Office Building, PO Box 687, Schoharie, New York 12157, (518) 295-8334

Schuyler County DSS, County Office Building, 323 Owego Street, Montour Falls, New York 14865, (607) 535-8303

Seneca County DSS, 1 Di Pronio Drive, PO Box 690, Waterloo, New York 13165-0690, (315) 539-1800

St. Lawrence County DSS, Harold B. Smith County Office Bldg., 6 Judson Street, Canton, New York 13617-1197, (315) 379-2111

Steuben County DSS, 3 East Pulteney Square, Bath, New York 14810, (607) 776-7611

Suffolk County DSS, 3085 Veterans Memorial Highway, Ronkonkoma, New York 11788-8900, (631) 854-9700 Riverhead (631) 852-3710, Hauppauge (631) 853-8730

Sullivan County DSS, P.O. Box 231, 16 Community Lane, Liberty, New York 12754, (845) 292-0100

Tioga County DSS, PO Box 240, Owego, New York 13827, (607) 687-8300

Tompkins County DSS, 320 West State Street, Ithaca, New York 14850, (607) 274-5359

Ulster County DSS, 1061 Development Court, Kingston, New York 12401-1959, (845) 334-5000

Warren County DSS, Municipal Center Annex, 1340 State Route 9, Lake George, New York 12845-9803, (518) 761-6321

Washington County DSS, Municipal Building, 383 Broadway, Fort Edward, New York 12828, (518) 746-2300

Wayne County DSS, 77 Water Street, PO Box 10, Lyons, New York 14489-0010, (315) 946-4881

Westchester County DSS, County Office Building #2, 112 East Post Road, White Plains, New York 10601, (914) 995-5000

Wyoming County DSS, 466 North Main Street, Warsaw, New York 14569-1080, (585) 786-8900

Yates County DSS, County Office Building, 417 Liberty St. Suite 2122, Penn Yan, New York 14527-1118, (315) 536-5183