



Veterans Court Participant's Handbook

**Superior Court of California
County of Orange**

Welcome to the Orange County Veterans Court program. This handbook is designed to answer questions, address concerns, and provide overall information about Veterans Court. As a participant, you will be expected to follow the instructions given in Veterans Court by the Judge and comply with the treatment plan developed for you by your Veterans Court team. This handbook will provide you with a general description of what is expected of you as a Veterans Court participant. Participants are encouraged to share this handbook with family and friends.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Orange County Veterans Court program is a court-supervised, comprehensive treatment collaborative, whose goal is to help you address the issues that led to your contact with the criminal justice system. This is a voluntary program that includes regular court appearances before a designated Veterans Court Judge. Treatment includes weekly individual and group counseling, drug and alcohol testing, if applicable, and regular attendance at self-help meetings, if appropriate (such as Narcotics Anonymous or Alcoholics Anonymous). Treatment is provided through the combined effort of the Probation Department, the Veterans Administration (VA), Health Care Agency (H.C.A.), and other agencies. They will also assist you with obtaining education and skill assessments and will provide referrals for vocational training, education and/or job placement services. The program's length, determined by each participant's progress, will be no less than 18 months. Ongoing aftercare services will be available to all graduates.

Following arrest, depending on your eligibility, you will be offered a choice of Veterans Court or prosecution on the pending charges. A Deputy Public Defender or your private counsel will advise you of your choices and discuss the Veterans Court program with you. Entry into the Veterans Court program is voluntary but will require that you enter a guilty plea. You will be placed on formal probation for a period of three years. You will be instructed to immediately report to the Probation Department following your plea. While on probation, you will be ordered to comply with specific terms and conditions. You will be assigned to a Probation Officer who will be responsible for providing supervision and enforcing probation terms and conditions. Probation supervision will include unannounced home visits, during which both you and your place of residence are subject to search, and if appropriate will also include random drug /alcohol testing. In addition, local law enforcement officers may assist your Probation Officer in your supervision. Your defense counsel will continue to represent you throughout your participation in Veterans Court.

There is an initial 14-day "window period", in which you may withdraw your plea and request prosecution on your case, or during which an eligibility or suitability issue may arise which may disqualify you. Successful completion and "graduation" from the program may result in having the charges dismissed and termination of probation. Failure or discharge from the program will result in imposition of sentence.

The Veterans Court Judge will oversee your progress and have full jurisdiction of the entire process. Final determination of entry into the program will be made by the Judge, with the input of the District Attorney, VA, defense counsel,

Probation, law enforcement, Health Care Agency (H.C.A.), and other agencies as appropriate.

VETERANS COURT SUPERVISION

As a Veterans Court participant, you will be required to appear in court as directed. At each appearance, the Judge will be given a progress report prepared by the Probation Department and the VA, with input from other agencies as appropriate, regarding your drug test results, attendance and your participation. The Judge may ask you questions about your progress and discuss any specific problems you have been experiencing. If you are doing well, you will be encouraged to continue with the program, and to work with your treatment team toward success. If you are not doing well, the Judge will discuss this with you and your treatment team, and further action will be determined. A program violation – including but not limited to a missed, positive, diluted or tampered test, or tardiness, or the failure to attend a session of individual or group counseling, a self-help meeting, or a court hearing – will result in a court-imposed sanction. (See **SANCTIONS** on page 22.) With repeated violations of program expectations or the failure to progress satisfactorily, the Court may impose the ultimate sanction of discharge from the program and imposition of sentence. At which time, you are entitled to a hearing.

Failure to appear in court on the date and time you are scheduled could result in a warrant being issued for your arrest, and your being placed into custody. If you cannot appear in court as scheduled, you must notify your lawyer. If you cannot reach your lawyer, notify the court clerk prior to the time set for the court

appearance. If you have any questions regarding your court appearances, you may contact your attorney.

Prolonged or repeated absence from the program or a new arrest may result in you being terminated from the Veterans Court program and the imposition of sentence. Violations which could result in termination also include demonstrating a lack of response to program interventions by failing to cooperate with treatment, and violence or threats of violence directed at the treatment team or other clients. All decisions regarding termination from the program will be made by the Veterans Court Judge after receiving the recommendations of the Veterans Court team.

VETERANS COURT PROGRAM RULES

As a Veterans Court participant, you will be required to abide by the following rules:

- 1. Attend all ordered treatment sessions.**

This includes individual and group counseling, educational sessions, program-related events such as Veterans Court graduations, and self-help meetings. If you are unable to attend a scheduled session, you must contact your VA counselor. Although notifying your VA counselor will not necessarily excuse your tardiness or absence, it will allow the counselor to consider any special circumstances that might be involved.

2. Report to your Probation Officer as directed.

You must comply with all conditions of probation as directed by your Probation Officer. You must also notify your Probation Officer prior to any change in residence. If you are unable to report as directed, contact your Probation Officer immediately.

3. If applicable, submit to drug and alcohol testing.

Sobriety is a primary focus of this program. Maintaining a lifestyle free of drugs is very important in your recovery process. Do not use or possess any drugs or alcohol. You must be prepared to provide a urine sample at each visit to the VA and Probation. If you fail to provide a monitored urine sample, this will be considered a positive drug test.

You must notify your treatment team of any prescription or over-the-counter medication or any of the alternative treatments typically found in health food stores you are taking.

4. Be on time to all appointments including court appearances.

If you are late for a counseling session, you may not be allowed to attend that session and you will be considered non-compliant. Contact your VA counselor if there is a possibility you may be late. If you are late for court, you may receive a sanction or the Judge may issue a bench warrant for your arrest.

5. Do not make threats toward other participants, staff, or behave in a violent or threatening manner.

Violent or inappropriate behavior will not be tolerated and will be reported to the Court. This may result in termination from the Veterans Court Program.

6. Dress appropriately for court and treatment sessions.

As a participant, you will be expected to wear a shirt or blouse and pants, dress or skirt of reasonable size and length. Shoes must be worn at all times. Clothing bearing drug or alcohol related themes that promotes or advertises alcohol, drug use, or violence is inappropriate. Sunglasses and hats are not to be worn inside the court or at the VA treatment center unless medically necessary. If you wear excessively revealing clothing or gang-related attire, you may be asked to leave the VA or the court, resulting in a missed appointment. Speak with your treatment team if you need assistance with obtaining suitable clothing.

7. While in the courtroom, remain seated and quiet at all times.

It is very important to observe appropriate behavior in court for the benefit of yourself and others present. Remain seated at all times. Turn off all cell phones and pagers; do not text message. Gum chewing or food consumption is not allowed in the courtroom. In the event of an emergency, notify the bailiff or your attorney before you leave the courtroom.

8. Police informant activity.

Participation as an information may place individuals in an environment where drugs are prevalent. This activity dramatically reduces a Veterans Court participant's potential for success in the program. Therefore, an individual choosing to participate in Veterans Court will not be allowed to act as a police informant. If you are participating with a police agency in this manner, you must inform the Veterans Court screener of your role as a police informant at the time of your initial interview. Any participant who becomes a police informant after acceptance into the Veterans Court program shall be terminated without penalty, provided they are in program compliance.

PROGRAM FEES

As a participant on formal probation, you will be required to pay the cost of probation supervision. The cost is, approximately \$120.00 per month or as directed by the Court based upon your ability to pay. Payments will be made directly to the Probation Department. Treatment providers and/or residential treatment programs may also impose their own fees on a sliding scale. No one will be refused services due to an inability to pay.

TREATMENT PROCEDURES

Your treatment will be provided through a team approach with the combined resources of the VA, the Probation Department, and other treatment providers as appropriate. The treatment team will assess what level of treatment will best meet your needs and recommend to the Veterans Court Judge that you receive either outpatient or residential treatment. If you are admitted to a residential treatment program, your treatment plan will include the requirements of that program. Upon release from a residential program you will continue your participation in the Veterans Court program as directed by the Court. If you are not admitted into a residential treatment program, a multi-component, outpatient program has been developed through the VA which includes:

Treatment Plans

You and your VA Social Worker, following an overall assessment of your needs, will develop an "initial" treatment plan. The plan will act as a guide for your initial treatment phase, and within it you will set goals, select methods for meeting those goals, and develop target dates for achieving those goals. The plan will be maintained by your treatment team and will be updated, as you progress through the program.

Drug Testing (if it is applicable)

You will be tested for drug and alcohol use on a set schedule and at random times through the entire treatment process as appropriate. During Orientation, you will be tested a minimum of three times weekly. As you progress through the phases of the program, you may be tested less frequently. Additionally, you may be required to wear a drug test patch (a 24-hour drug testing device). The

Veterans Court Judge will have access to all drug test results including any failures to test, and may order a drug test at any time. Tampering with any drug test will be deemed a positive test and may result in termination. Although, relapse may occur in recovery, a positive or "dirty" test will result in a court-imposed sanction. The Judge will review your overall performance in the program; repeated offenses may result in progressively severe sanctions, and may ultimately result in termination from the program.

Counseling

Substance abuse counseling is comprised of two separate formats: individual and group. As part of your treatment plan, you will be required to participate in both types of counseling if it is appropriate. Together they are designed to develop self-awareness, self-discipline, and coping mechanisms necessary to maintain your sobriety. You may be required to attend additional treatment groups such as anger management, parenting, or any other topic the treatment team recognizes as needed. Your attendance at both individual and group counseling sessions will be reported to the Judge as part of your progress report. You must have prior permission from your VA counselor to be excused from a counseling session. Children are not permitted in treatment sessions at the VA and are not to be left unattended in the building. Child care is provided onsite while you are at the Community Court.

Mentor Program

You will be assigned a volunteer veteran mentor from the community to support your efforts to create a better life.

Self-Help Meetings

Attendance may be required at self-help meetings such as Narcotics Anonymous or Alcoholics Anonymous. The frequency of required attendance is determined by your progress in the program and your phase level. Attendance is an important part of the recovery process. It will help to familiarize you with the self-help philosophy, and help you to develop levels of trust that will enable you to create social bonds with other recovering addicts. Your treatment team will provide you with information regarding the time and location of self-help meetings and will also direct you to special interest and recovery events in the community. You must provide proof of attendance to your health care counselor and probation officer prior to each court appearance. The program requires you to have a sponsor and work the steps of your self-help program. Repeated failures to attend self-help meetings or falsifying of self-help meeting cards may result in termination from Veterans Court.

Case Management

Case Management services are provided by the treatment team and as a result of a continuous assessment of your needs. These services will facilitate your effort to successfully complete this program and become a productive member of society. The services may include:

- Detoxification Referrals
- Residence Referrals
- Psychological and/or Psychiatric Evaluation
- Employment Search
- Education Referrals
- Perinatal Program Services for expecting and female parents
- Parenting Education Referrals (i.e. parenting classes, etc.)

TREATMENT PHASES

The Veterans Court Treatment program is a four-phase, highly structured, out-patient treatment program, lasting for a minimum of 18 months. Individual progress will vary. Each phase consists of specified treatment objectives, therapeutic and rehabilitative activities, and specific requirements for advancement into the next phase. The components and requirements for advancement from each phase are described below.

Window Period- 14 days

The window period is a fourteen-day period in which the potential participant will decide whether or not Veterans Court is appropriate for his or her needs. At the same time, the Veterans Court team will evaluate the participant's appropriateness for the program. During the window period, the participant will actively participate in all Veterans Court Program requirements. The Judge may extend this window if he or she deems it necessary. The 30-day Orientation phase includes the window period.

The participant is subject to all Veterans Court, VA, and Probation rules and regulations during the window period. If these rules and regulations are violated, the participant is subject to sanctions imposed by the Judge.

Orientation - Introduction, assessment, and assimilation

Length: a minimum of 30 days

During Orientation, you will be assigned a VA Social Worker and a Probation Officer who will provide you with an overview of the program. Your needs will be assessed and addressed by this "treatment team." Your progress will be

closely monitored by the treatment team and reported to the Judge. Orientation Phase requirements may include:

1. A minimum of one individual and one group therapy session per week with the VA or other treatment provider
2. Drug testing three times per week minimum (drug test patch and immediate-result drug tests may be used at the treatment team's discretion, if appropriate)
3. Taking medication as directed by medical and/or mental health professionals
4. Attendance at five to seven self-help meetings per week (if applicable)
5. Reporting to the VA Social Worker and the Probation Officer once weekly
6. Additional case management services as determined by the treatment team (Detoxification, employment search, psychiatric and/or psychological evaluation)
7. Weekly or bi-weekly court appearances as determined by the Veterans Court Judge
8. Consistent financial payments to Probation, and other agencies as determined by the treatment team
9. Curfew as indicated by the Court or treatment facility

Advancement Criteria:

- No positive drug test results (including missed or tampered tests) for 30 consecutive days
- No unexcused absences from scheduled services for fourteen (14) consecutive days

- Medication taken as directed
- Documentation of required minimum attendance at self-help meetings for one month
- Acknowledgment of extent of substance abuse problem and a commitment to live an alcohol and drug-free lifestyle
- Submittal of a written Phase I advancement request

Phase I - Treatment Plan Development

Length: a minimum of 90 days

In Phase I, your treatment plan will be developed by you and your VA counselor. Together with your VA counselor, you will formulate personal achievement goals in addition to treatment plan goals (GED, vocational/educational counseling, psychotherapy, exercise, anger management, parenting skills, etc.). Phase I requirements include:

1. A minimum of one individual and one group therapy session weekly
2. Drug testing three times per week minimum (drug test patch and immediate result drug tests may be used at the treatment team's discretion, if appropriate)
3. Taking medication as directed by medical and/or mental health professionals
4. Attendance at self-help meetings (a minimum of four per week) and actively seeking a sponsor (if applicable)
5. Reporting to your Probation Officer weekly
6. Clean & sober recreation/fellowship
7. Additional case management services as may be determined by the treatment team.

8. Formulation of personal program goals in conjunction with the treatment team (GED, vocational/educational counseling, psychotherapy, exercise, anger management, parenting skills, etc.)
9. Weekly or bi-weekly court appearances as determined by the Drug Court Judge.
10. Curfew as indicated by the Court or treatment facility

Advancement Criteria:

- No positive drug test results (including missed or tampered tests) for 90 consecutive days
- No unexcused absences from scheduled services for 21 consecutive days
- Medication taken as directed
- Employed or positive response to vocational/educational goals
- Documentation of required minimum attendance at self-help meetings for a minimum of 90 days (if applicable)
- Must have a self-help sponsor
- Demonstration of a positive adjustment to treatment
- Appropriate payment of fees to Probation, and other agencies as determined by the treatment team
- Submittal of a written Phase II advancement request

Phase II - Ongoing treatment

Length: a minimum of 90 days

In Phase II, your treatment plan will be updated by you and your counselor to identify your treatment goals and objectives. Counseling and meetings will

focus on areas that are challenging for you, and will identify ways of coping with stressful situations. Phase II requirements include:

1. A minimum of one group therapy session weekly, and individual sessions as determined by your treatment counselor
2. Drug and alcohol testing as appropriate (drug test patch and immediate result drug tests used at the treatment team's discretion, if appropriate)
3. Taking medication as directed by medical and/or mental health professionals
4. Attendance at self-help meetings (minimum of three per week), maintenance of a sponsor and working the self-help steps, if appropriate
5. Reporting to your Probation Officer weekly or as instructed
6. Clean and sober recreation/fellowship
7. Additional case management services as determined by the treatment team
8. Ongoing review and updating of the treatment plan
9. Employment and/or educational "goal setting"
10. Biweekly or monthly Court appearances as determined by the Veterans Court Judge
12. Curfew as indicated by the Court or treatment facility

Advancement Criteria:

- No positive drug test results (including missed or tampered tests) for 90 consecutive days
- No unexcused absences from scheduled services for 30 consecutive days

- Medication taken as directed
- Employed or actively pursuing vocational/educational goals
- Continued documentation of attendance at no fewer than three self-help meetings per week, and having a sponsor for a minimum of 90 days
- Continued demonstration of a positive adjustment to ongoing treatment
- Verbal expression of understanding of self-help concepts
- Progress toward treatment plan goals
- Submittal of a written Phase III advancement request

Phase III – Stabilization/Mentoring

Length: a minimum of 145 days

Phase III will address your ongoing recovery needs including maintaining total abstinence from all drugs. The focus will be on daily living skills. This phase is designed to support you in your return to the community as a productive and responsible member. Phase III requirements include:

1. One or more group therapy sessions per week and individual sessions as determined by the treatment counselor
2. Drug testing one time per week or as directed (drug test patch and immediate result drug tests used at the treatment team's discretion, if appropriate)
3. Taking medication as directed by medical and/or mental health professionals

4. Attendance at self-help meetings (at least two per week) and maintenance of a sponsor, if appropriate
5. Report to your VA Social Worker and Probation Officer as instructed
6. Clean and sober recreation/fellowship
7. Other case management services as determined to be necessary by the treatment team
8. Ongoing review and updating of treatment plan
9. Maintain full-time employment and/or progress toward an educational goal
10. Monthly Court appearances
11. Become a mentor to a new Veterans Court participant as approved by your treatment team
12. Participation in community service as determined by the Veterans Court team (minimum of eight hours)
14. Curfew at the discretion of the Court

Advancement Criteria:

- If applicable, acceptable level of sobriety (no positive drug test results, including missed or tampered tests, for 90 consecutive days), as determined by the treatment team
- No unexcused absences from scheduled services for 30 consecutive days
- Medication taken as directed
- Employed or actively pursuing a vocational/academic training program as determined by the treatment team

- Continued documentation of required attendance at no fewer than two self-help meetings each week if applicable
- Progress towards treatment plan goals
- Significant progress towards completion of GED/diploma or ESL program at the discretion of the court
- Verbal expression of understanding of self-help content (if applicable)
- Demonstrate positive adjustment to treatment
- Submittal of a written Phase IV advancement request

Phase IV – Achievement/Graduation

Length: a minimum of 6 months

Phase IV will help you successfully transition from a lifestyle within the Veterans Court structure to a lifestyle more representative of what participants will experience following graduation. Phase IV requirements include:

1. Attend an individual counseling session with your primary therapist a minimum of once per month and, in the final month of the program, one group counseling session and one final individual counseling session to complete an exit plan
2. Drug and alcohol tests, conducted on a random basis as directed and if it is applicable
3. Taking medication as directed by medical and/or mental health professionals
4. Self-help meetings not required, but strongly encouraged (if applicable)
5. Report to your VA Social Worker and Probation Officer once per month

6. Clean and sober recreation/fellowship
7. Other case management services as determined to be necessary by the treatment team
8. Ongoing review and updating of your treatment plan
9. Maintain full-time employment and/or actively pursue vocational/educational goals
10. Appear in court for progress reviews an average of once every six weeks
11. Continue established mentoring relationships
12. Preparation of graduation application and speech

Graduation Criteria:

- If applicable, acceptable level of sobriety (no positive drug tests, including missed, tampered, or dilute tests for a minimum of 180 consecutive days), as determined by the treatment team
- Obtain gainful, consistent employment or be sufficiently involved in a vocational/educational training program as determined by the treatment team
- Medication taken as directed
- Maintain consistent attendance at all court appearances and treatment team appointments
- No unexcused absences from scheduled services for 45 consecutive days
- Achievement of stable living arrangements and healthy interpersonal relationships, as determined by the treatment team

- Achievement of an understanding of personal problems of addiction, criminal behavior, and relapse prevention as demonstrated through a written graduation application
- A definitive aftercare plan, which may include self-help meetings, VA outpatient counseling, group attendance at a former contract residential program, or active participation in the Veterans Court Alumni Association
- Fulfillment of goals as stated in your individual treatment plan or positive progress toward appropriate long-term life goals
- Proof of completion of required community service hours
- Proof of attendance at all other events or courses as required by the Veterans Court Judge
- Proof of completion of GED/diploma or an approved equivalent program as required by the Veterans Court Judge

OTHER PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

The Veterans Court Judge may require you to fulfill other program goals such as attending community college courses, attending civic and/or cultural events, participating in an exercise program or completing community service hours. As previously noted, the Veterans Court Judge may impose additional conditions of probation such as a curfew. The Veterans Court Judge will inform you of any additional requirements and your attorney, VA Social Worker, and Probation Officer will provide any necessary clarification.

SANCTIONS

If you fail to comply with the Treatment Program, the Veterans Court Judge may, at his or her discretion, order one or more of the following:

- Admonishment from the Court
- Increased drug testing
- Writing an essay on a Veterans Court-related topic which must be read aloud at your VA group meeting or at court, as instructed
- Increased participation in self-help meetings
- Increased participation in individual and/or group counseling sessions
- Increased frequency of court appearances
- Community service hours in addition to those required by the program
- Demotion to an earlier program phase
- Commitment to community residential treatment
- Incarceration
- Finding of a formal probation violation
- Expulsion from the program and imposition of sentence

EDUCATION, VOCATION AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

Learning to become a self-sufficient, productive, and responsible member of the community means learning to deal with mental health issues and/or recovery from alcohol or substance addiction.

It also means that you will be expected, during the treatment program, to obtain full-time employment or part-time employment and/or participate in an educational or vocational training program. Your counselor will help you obtain an assessment of your needs and skills and will refer you to the proper agencies for education, training, and job placement.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Upon your entry into the Veterans Court program, your treatment team will assess your housing, transportation, family situation and general living needs; and, when appropriate, will refer you to local, state and/or county agencies for additional assistance.

GRADUATION

Once you have successfully completed the criteria for each Phase (as described in the Treatment Phases section beginning on page 12), you will advance to the next level and eventually be a candidate to graduate from the Veterans Court program. You will submit a graduation request form to your Probation Officer. In the request form it is necessary to discuss your progress toward the goals you initially set, and why you believe you are ready to graduation. The final decision regarding advancement from each phase and graduation is solely determined by the Veterans Court Judge. Upon graduation, you may be given the opportunity to withdraw your plea and your case may be dismissed. Your family will be invited to join you as the Judge congratulates you

on successfully completing the Veterans Court program and achieving your goal to establish a better, more productive, self-directed life.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your identity and privacy will be protected consistent with Federal Regulations and State laws (e.g., 42CFR, Part 2; Health & Safety Code Sections 11812(c) and 5328, and 45CFR, Parts 160 and 164). In response to these regulations, policies and procedures have been developed which safeguard confidentiality. You will be asked to sign a waiver authorizing the transfer of information among all participating agencies; and an identification number will be assigned to you that will be used in all research and evaluation activities to insure confidentiality.

CONCLUSION

The Veterans Court program has been developed to help you achieve a healthy lifestyle outside the criminal justice system. This may include addressing your mental health issues and/or teaching you to become abstinent from alcohol or drug use.

The program is designed to promote self-sufficiency and to return you to the community as a productive and responsible citizen. The program is voluntary and is your personal choice. The Judge, the Court staff, and the treatment team are present to guide and assist you, but the final responsibility is yours. You must be motivated to make this change and commit to a better, more productive, self-directed life.

We hope this handbook has been helpful to you and has answered most of your questions. If you have any additional questions or concerns about the Veterans Court program, please feel free to ask your treatment team. A month-at-a-glance calendar and a Self-Help Meeting Attendance Record Sheet have been included in this handbook for your convenience.

Good luck to you.

MONTH-AT-A-GLANCE CALENDAR

MONTH _____

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

MONTH _____

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

SELF-HELP MEETING ATTENDANCE RECORD

DATE	NAME OF GROUP	GROUP SECRETARY

APPENDIX A:
PHASE REQUIREMENTS AT-A-GLANCE

PHASE	MINIMUM DAYS	SELF-HELP MEETINGS PER WEEK	DRUG TESTING (if applicable)	VA and PROBATION MEETINGS	TREATMENT and COUNSELING MEETINGS	
WINDOW	14	5 to 7	3x/week	1/week	1 to 2 x/week, or more as needed	
ORIENTATION	30	5 to 7	3x/week	1/week	1 to 2 x/week, or more as needed	
PHASE I	90	4	3x/week	1/week	1 to 2 x/week, or more as needed	
PHASE II	90	3	2x/week	1/week – TBD	1 to 2 x/week, or more as needed	
PHASE III	145	2	1x/week – TBD	TBD	1 to 2 x/week, or more as needed	
PHASE IV	180	0	Random 2x/month	1x/month	1 to 2 x/week, or more as needed	

*The table above lists the **minimum** requirements of each phase. Participants may be required to do more than what is listed, as determined by the treatment team and the Veterans Court judge.