

VETERANS RESPONSE PROGRAM GUIDE



DAVE YOST
OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL

“When we work together and harness all available resources, we can help those who have served our country come wholly home. Thank you, Attorney General Dave Yost, for leading the law enforcement initiative to lean forward.”

**OHIO SUPREME COURT JUSTICE
SHARON L. KENNEDY**

From the AG

“Leave no man behind” is a military tradition that probably extends back to the beginning of time.

It is a promise that soldiers make to one another: If you fall on the battlefield, we will bring you home to your country and loved ones.

But as a nation, we have not always made good on this promise. Even after we bring our wounded warriors home, in thousands of cases, we have left their minds and spirits trapped on the battlefield, endlessly reliving their traumas.

Many of these veterans don't recognize what is happening to them and, as a result, try to silence their demons in destructive ways, whether through substance abuse, violence or suicide. Many of them, dogged by addiction, cycle in and out of prisons, jails and homelessness.

There are 680,000 veterans living in Ohio, including 17,000 from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injuries (TBI). Former service members make up 6.5% of our homeless population, and — in 2018, the most recent year for which data is available — they accounted for 17% of the suicides nationwide.

This tragic reality is one that law enforcement officers throughout our state know well, and many of our officers are veterans themselves. Situations in which they engage troubled veterans are potentially dangerous for both the officers and the veterans, as escalation can occur very quickly.

To address these issues, I am working with Ohio Supreme Court Justice Sharon Kennedy and former Justice Evelyn Lundberg Stratton to boost local support for veterans through the development of Veterans Response Programs across Ohio. These programs bring law enforcement, the courts and community resources together to better help struggling veterans.

We owe a debt of gratitude to the men and women who serve to protect our freedom, and it is our duty to support them when they return home. My office stands ready to help anyone seeking to join the effort and create a Veterans Response Program in their community.



DAVE YOST

OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL

Starting a Veterans Response Program

Things to consider

One of the first steps to building a Veterans Response Program involves learning about the local need and available resources. Some questions to ask:

- What is the jurisdiction's veteran population? What local data and demographics concerning veterans are available?
- Is there a Veterans Affairs (VA) Office or VA hospital in or near the jurisdiction?
- Who is the Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) specialist assigned to the area?
- Does the jurisdiction have a veterans treatment court and/or a veterans-specific unit in the local jail?
- What other government and community resources exist for veterans in the jurisdiction?

Many of these answers can be found through an internet search or by contacting the local VA office and community nonprofit partners.

Components of a Veterans Response Program

Veterans Response Programs can look different from agency to agency, but all work to connect struggling veterans with the resources they need and to improve the relationship and understanding between first responders and veterans.

Programs might:

- Provide military pins that designate former branch of service to officers or deputies who are veterans themselves to wear as they go about their duties. This identifiable addition to the uniform can help facilitate communication with a veteran in crisis.
- Provide officers and deputies with Veterans Resource Pocket Cards, which they can distribute as needed and appropriate.

- Gain access to the VA's Veterans Re-Entry Search Service (VRSS), which helps law enforcement and court personnel determine whether an individual is a veteran.
- Update official agency reports or paperwork to include a "checkbox" that identifies whether an individual is a military veteran. This information can then be shared with the appropriate VA office or other resource agencies that assist veterans.
- Establish a system of communication and information sharing with the VA and other community resource agencies.
- Establish a working relationship with the Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) specialist.
- Establish a working relationship with the local justice system and Veterans Court, if applicable. This would include identifying veterans upon entry into the court system and local detention facility, with notification to the local VA office for confirmation and appropriate services.
- Provide training and education for all officers or deputies focused on mental health issues related to military service, such as PTSD, TBI, depression and/or anxiety.
- Create a Veterans Response Team that meets regularly to discuss issues veterans are facing in the community as well as suitable responses.
- Organize coordinated and trained teams of first responders willing to respond 24/7 to any call for assistance involving a veteran in crisis. These teams should include local veteran resources, mental health crisis workers and law enforcement. At least one responding team member should be a veteran.
- Develop a plan to measure program outcomes and track data concerning military veterans. This can provide law enforcement with essential information during and following veteran-involved critical events.
- Consider maintaining contact and forging ongoing relationships with veterans who have received assistance.

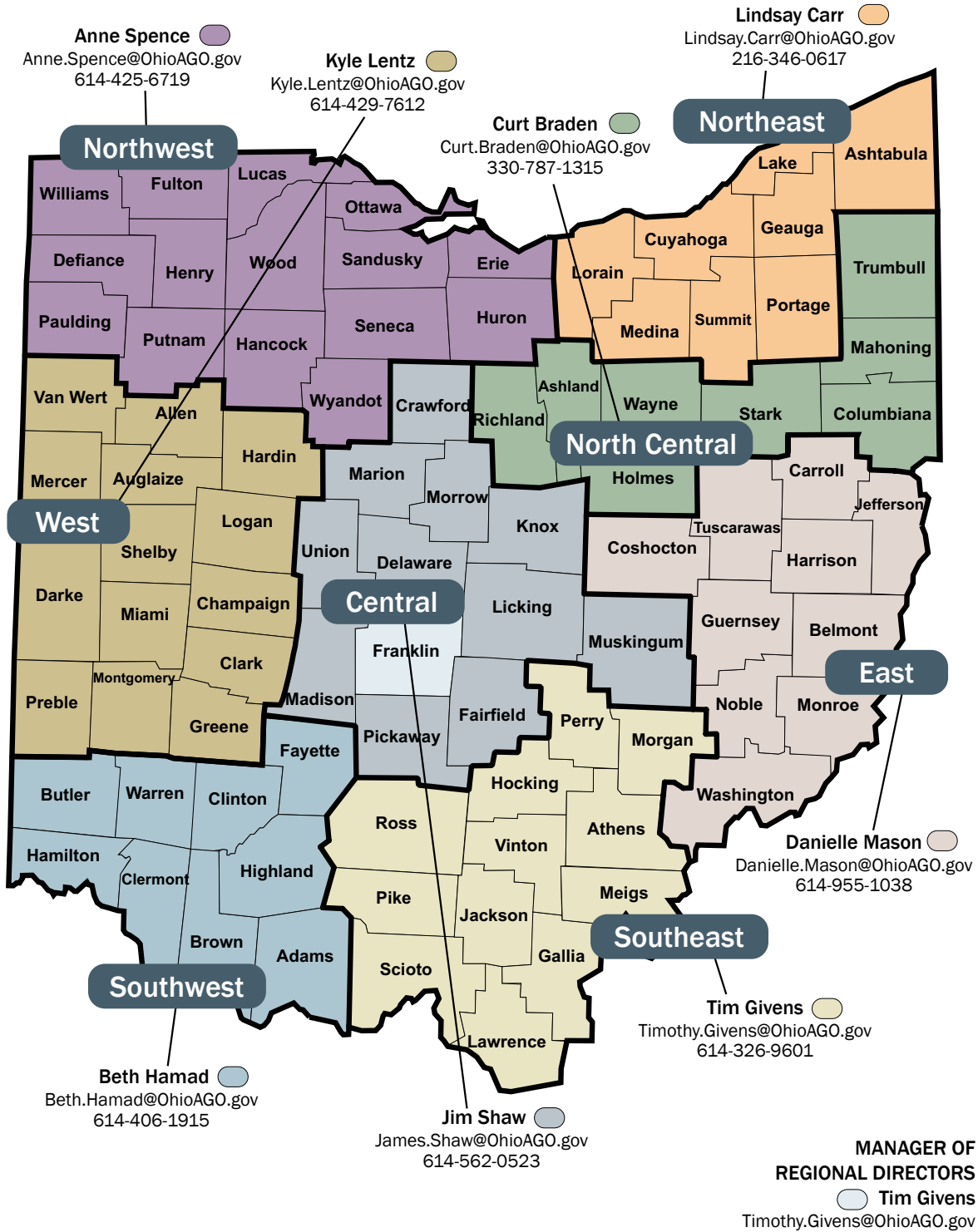
This list covers many potential elements of a Veterans Response Program, but it is certainly not all-inclusive. Programs should be designed to best meet the needs of individual communities.

Creating a Veterans Response Team

- Identify a “champion” within the law enforcement agency who is passionate about and committed to forming a Veterans Response Team and willing to lead the effort.
- Identify others in the law enforcement agency (often veterans themselves) who are interested and willing to participate on the team.
- Identify and invite interested community members to join the team. They might include members of veteran resource organizations, the local VA, the regional VJO, other law enforcement agencies, fire/EMS departments, hospitals, social work agencies, the justice system, nonprofits, etc.
- Establish a regular meeting schedule, such as monthly team roundtables, at which team members can discuss issues veterans are facing in the community and suitable responses.
- Immerse team members in the veteran community by attending veteran events, joining on veteran-involved emergency runs and making public appearances to further engage with veterans.
- Provide Veterans in Crisis Training for all those involved with the team. Also consider special training for other officers or deputies who are likely to come in contact with veterans.
- Organize coordinated and trained teams of first responders willing to respond 24/7 to any call for assistance involving a veteran in crisis. These teams should include local veteran resources, mental health crisis workers and law enforcement. At least one responding team member should be a veteran.

Source: U.S. Department of Justice National Institute of Corrections publication “Veteran Response Teams: Law Enforcement Officers Respecting Service, Restoring Honor for Vets in Crisis”

If you are interested in learning more or beginning the process of starting a Veterans Response Program, please contact the Attorney General's regional director representing your area:





DAVE YOST

OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL

Ohio Attorney General's Office

30 E. Broad St., 17th floor
Columbus, OH 43215

800-282-0515

www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov