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NEWS RELEASE

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VA and law enforcement collaboration leads to increase in health care utilization study finds

WILMINGTON, Del. – Wilmington VA police and social workers created a first-of-its-kind partnership with Delaware law enforcement to study the effects of Veteran-specific police intervention tactics.

The study [recently published in the Journal of Public Health Management and Practice](#) and found an increase in overall health care utilization at Wilmington VA after Veteran-police interactions occurred.

“This partnership is known as a Veteran Response Team and prepares officers with the skills and resources needed to help Veterans in crisis,” Paul Woodland, Wilmington VA Police Chief said. “This approach can prevent future law enforcement interaction by diverting Veterans out of the criminal justice system and into the clinical setting. There, we can address the root cause of the issue that led to the incident.”

[According to the National Institute of Corrections](#), Veteran Response Teams improve outcomes for Veterans and minimize hostile or volatile situations for both law enforcement and Veterans.

The National Center on Homelessness among Veterans in partnership with Wilmington VA analyzed data on 241 Veterans in Wilmington, Del. who had an interaction with VA police or community police. Of the 241 individuals, 92.5% were already enrolled in VA health care and 4.1% applied for VA health care after police intervention.

The data compared health care utilization six months before and six months after police involvement and found a greater than 40% increase in outpatient mental health services and a 59% increase in outpatient substance abuse services.

“This is more than just training. It’s purposeful coordination between VA, law enforcement and community partners that creates a network of support to address Veterans’ underlying issues,” Cecilia Gonzalez, Wilmington VA Veteran Justice Outreach Supervisor said. “It gives Veterans an opportunity to change the trajectory of their lives and potentially deflect from incarceration.”

Only four VA sites in the country have Veteran Response Teams – Delaware, New Jersey, Ohio and Pennsylvania. Wilmington VA implemented the practice in 2016 for Delaware and January 2023 for southern New Jersey.

Wilmington VA Medical Center provides health care services to more than 40,000 Veterans throughout Delaware and southern New Jersey at its medical center and five outpatient clinics.

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