



TDCJ-Involved Veterans, Senior Citizens, and Homeless Populations

Interim Charge #2: Examine gaps in services and assess efforts to connect justice-involved veterans, senior citizens, and homeless populations to services while incarcerated and after release at both the local and state levels. Specifically, the committee should evaluate training and technical assistance provided by the Texas Veterans Commission to criminal justice agencies.

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) works in collaboration with other state agencies and local resources to address the needs of veterans, senior citizens, and homeless populations incarcerated in TDCJ. The agency assists these populations by identifying existing needs, delivering services while incarcerated, and making appropriate referrals for community resources when released into society.

TDCJ-Involved Senior Needs

Inmates 55 years of age or older are considered elderly and experience a myriad of challenges that are not common to a younger incarcerated population, yet they are able to take advantage of the many program opportunities available to all inmates. The population of incarcerated individuals have aged at a faster pace than that of the general population, meaning inmates feel the effects of aging sooner than most people. The number of elderly inmates is rising and expected to trend higher. As of October 31, 2020, there are 19,248 inmates over the age of 55, a 51% increase since 2010. Aging presents additional reentry barriers such as medical conditions, medication access, appropriate housing, family reunification, and a source of income, to name a few.





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Seniors - While Incarcerated

While incarcerated, TDCJ inmates live in the general population as long as they are independently able to perform the activities of daily living and keep up with the unit's schedule. Specialized housing is needed for those geriatric inmates who cannot live in the general population.

Inmates who begin to show signs of infirmity due to age, and cannot function well in general population, but do not need help with their activities of daily living can be moved into "sheltered housing". To help support the growing population of elderly inmates, TDCJ and the Correctional Managed Health Care Committee, with funding support provided through the Legislature, have created additional "sheltered housing" beds at various units. These "sheltered housing" beds for geriatric inmates allow for medical treatment including intermittent long-term oxygen therapy.

Some aging inmates move to a geriatric facility where inmates need operational and physical accommodations. Geriatric units provide ambulatory and outpatient medical services, supported by a telemedicine program and health care staff. Seniors who require geriatric care, consistent with assisted living or nursing home level care in the community, are placed in the medically appropriate level of care that meets their daily needs addressing medication, medical services, and dietary provisions.

Attending to a senior citizen's medical needs are necessary but providing multidimensional opportunities for development are important as well. Seniors are offered programmatic opportunities such as faith-based dorms, life skills programs, education, substance abuse treatment, sex offender treatment, cognitive intervention, and post-secondary education programming. In addition, there are Reading Acceleration Programs (literacy programming) offered through the Chaplaincy Department, Peer Support Services, and specialized Peer-to-Peer support for those who need Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accommodations. Additionally, volunteers provide pet therapy programs on designated geriatric units.



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Seniors – Reentering Society

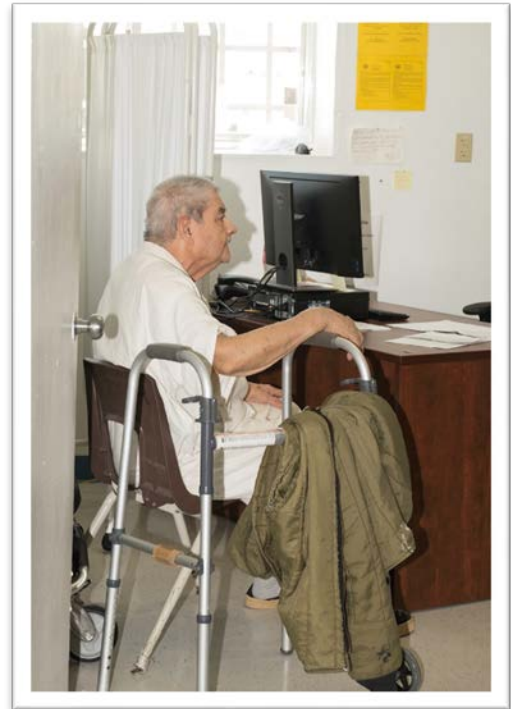
In preparation to reenter society, case planning is initiated by TDCJ for the geriatric inmate. This process begins months prior to release.

The assigned case manager will evaluate post-release needs of the inmate to ensure continuity of care. This evaluation will be informed by the inmate and his/her medical care providers to identify medical and mental health needs. Family members, if available, may also be engaged in the pre-release planning process to address the senior inmate's unique circumstance.

Trained TDCJ reentry staff assist this geriatric population to apply for, or restart, Social Security and Medicare entitlements. After being released with a 30-day supply of prescribed medications, with entitlement coverage in place, the geriatric inmate will be able to access medical services and needed medications in the post-release environment.

While the ability to reside with family is optimal, in some instances it is not possible due to physical limitations, medical needs, or lack of family resources. The agency works to identify appropriate housing that will meet the needs of the geriatric inmate. For more able-bodied senior citizens, case managers work to locate a senior residence using the agency's resource guide and knowledge of local housing availability. However, in some cases, the inmate may need to be placed in a skilled nursing facility. In that event, TDCJ Reentry and Integration Division (RID) staff will coordinate with TDCJ's Texas Correctional Office on Medical or Mental Impairments (TCOOMMI) to secure placement in an appropriate facility.

For senior inmates already released to supervision, TDCJ Parole Division (PD) staff coordinate with TCOOMMI on medical resources and skilled nursing placements. TDCJ RID case managers are also available to assist senior clients with referrals if any need emerges since reentering society.





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For those senior inmates who have a terminal illness or require long term care, but due to time remaining on their sentence are not scheduled for standard release, the Board of Pardons and Paroles (BPP) may approve an early release through the Medically Recommended Intensive Supervision (MRIS) program. The program provides for continuity of care and post-release case monitoring and coordination.

TDCJ-Involved Homeless Needs

Individuals who have experienced homelessness and are incarcerated within TDCJ may face challenges upon release including employment, housing, medical, and other issues. During incarceration, TDCJ provides effective, evidence-based and evidence informed treatment and programmatic services for individual inmates. Upon supervised release, individuals are provided with opportunities to access resources and programmatic support. These opportunities help facilitate positive change in the lives of inmates, help them reenter society, and help the individual overcome obstacles that lead to homelessness.

Homeless - While Incarcerated

Upon arrival to TDCJ or when assigned to a new unit, inmates are administered various tests to detect medical or mental health problems and to determine educational and intelligence levels by treatment professionals. These assessments help to create an inmate's Individualized Treatment Plan (ITP). If self-identified, the counselor will consider homelessness when creating the plan.

The ITP serves as the programmatic plan during an inmate's incarceration. The plan outlines programmatic activities and services for an inmate and prioritizes their participation in recommended programs based on the individual's needs, program availability and applicable parole or discharge date. While TDCJ treatment programs and access to health care resources are not solely for inmates who have experienced homelessness, these opportunities will benefit the inmate and prepare him or her for a successful integration into society.



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The ITP has a goal of reducing recidivism, removing barriers to reentry, and addressing the needs of the inmate to be successful, like addressing obstacles for a stable home. Opportunities include:

- Education
- Post-Secondary Education
- Vocational
- Mock Interviews
- Life Skills
- Substance Abuse Treatment
- State Jail Substance Abuse
- Sex Offender Treatment
- On-the-Job Training Certificates
- Faith-Based Dorms
- Cognitive Intervention
- Resume Writing

With employment being a key component to address homelessness, basic and vocational education opportunities are available through the Windham School District, along with on-the-job training opportunities to enhance the skills and learned during the educational courses. Inmates are also able to earn industrial certifications to further employability.

As the inmate begins to work toward the reentry planning phase, these programmatic components are incorporated into the case plan and aid in reducing the risk of homelessness upon release.

Homeless – Reentering Society

TDCJ does not release an inmate to parole without a verified home plan. Any inmate releasing to supervision who does not have an approved residence plan upon release will be placed by the TDCJ Parole Division (PD) in a residential reentry center, also known as a halfway house. TDCJ Reentry and Integration (RID) staff are available to assist an inmate with finding a more suitable residence. TDCJ compiles and maintains the *Reentry Resource Guide* with housing options included. It is available to inmates in hard copy at multiple locations on each prison unit and on the agency's webpage for post-release access. TDCJ RID staff are accessible for one-on-one review and assistance with housing.



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TDCJ recognizes that a state identification card, as well as a birth certificate and a social security card, helps an individual combat homelessness, obtain employment, and secure a residence. TDCJ works to ensure an inmate has identification documents at the time of release. TDCJ RID case managers screen and process documentation needs for all eligible inmates prior to release.

In addition to identification documents, upon release TDCJ inmates receive resumes outlining work service completed while incarcerated, including any educational achievements earned, as well as copies of vocational or other job training certificates. For those inmates with specific vocational skills, the inmate's information is uploaded to the TDCJ *Website for Work* web portal for potential employers to review and, if interested, offer employment.

TDCJ RID staff focus on employment as a significant element of a successful transition to the community and provide employment assistance both before and after release. To capitalize on education and job and skills training received while in custody, TDCJ offers career expositions, employment preparation classes (to include soft skills training), and job fairs on a consistent basis to enhance the inmate's employability and obtainment of employment, often working in conjunction with the Texas Workforce Commission. By securing employment, the risk of losing a residence is reduced, thereby providing a more stable environment for the inmate to finish their sentence or reintegrate in the community.

To further enhance strategies to address homelessness for those in the criminal justice system, the TDCJ participates in on-going collaborative workgroups and meetings with other agencies and entities to identify proven and emerging resources for those who have experienced homelessness.

TDCJ-Involved Veteran Needs

TDCJ is responsible for the identification of an inmate's veteran status and the coordination of activities on behalf of veteran inmates and veterans released to parole supervision. The TDCJ RID collaborates with multiple veteran organizations regarding reentry services. Each partner veteran organization's expertise enhances the individualized services TDCJ provides to the veteran population.



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Veterans – While Incarcerated

The TDCJ works to identify veterans at the point of incarceration by verifying all inmates through the Veterans Affairs Veteran's Reentry Search Service (VRSS). Upon verification, all veterans are provided with an agency brochure and incarcerated veterans literature outlining available services while incarcerated and beyond. Those services include:

- applying for the DD-214,
- compensation and pension, and
- information on education benefits such as the Hazlewood Act.



In coordination with the TDCJ Veterans Coordinator, case managers assist veterans with completing veteran forms and mailing them, at no cost, to the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) for review and then processing by the U.S. Veterans Administration (VA).



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Veterans who have established benefits or are awarded benefits while incarcerated are eligible to receive up to 10% of their benefits directly to their TDCJ commissary accounts. Additionally, staff assist eligible family members in applying for apportionment to receive up to 90% of the veteran's benefits while the veteran is incarcerated.

TDCJ welcomes 55 volunteer-run veteran programs on units statewide. On Veteran's Day, Memorial Day, and Armed Services birthdays there are special events at units for veterans provided by volunteer organizations. In addition to these programs, TDCJ coordinates with the TVC and the Samaritan Center to facilitate a Veteran Reentry Dorm for state jail inmates.

Veterans are housed in a peer support living environment. Incarcerated veterans may participate in TDCJ provided substance abuse treatment, faith-based programming, cognitive intervention, educational, vocational, certification, and on-the-job training programs. Veterans also participate in the process of mock interviews and resume writing. Through employment initiatives with second chance employers and veteran specific hiring strategies, the agency has increased the likelihood for incarcerated veterans to secure employment prior to release.

TDCJ is opening an in prison non-parole voted treatment program with peer housing dedicated to veterans and will soon be opening more peer housing to facilitate enhanced programming models of care for this specialized population.

Veterans – Reentering Society

In preparation for release, TDCJ coordinates with the TVC to initiate first time and reinstatement applications for VA benefits and health care which are then reviewed by TVC staff and submitted for processing. By initiating the inmate's veteran benefits application prior to release, the veteran can more quickly utilize these benefits post-release, upon approval.

To further assist the inmate in the veteran benefits application process, the agency has allowed contracted medical providers to conduct the VA required Compensation & Pension exams at the veteran's unit of assignment. If the process was initiated while the veteran was incarcerated, but incomplete prior to release, the agency will assist in coordinating the exams post-release.



TDCJ-Involved Veterans, Senior Citizens, and Homeless Populations

TDCJ coordinates with the VA's Health Care for Reentry Veterans (HCRV) program which links the veteran inmate with HCRV providers. Through the program, the inmate can access services such as:

- outreach and pre-release assessments,
- referrals to medical, mental health, and social services,
- post-release employment services,
- short-term case management assistance, and
- veteran housing opportunities.

Additionally, TDCJ staff will provide the veteran with resources such as military veteran peer support and continuity of care services.

As a supplement to the identification documents provided to all eligible releasing inmates, TDCJ RID staff provide the returning veteran with their DD-214 at the time of release.