The Impact of Impaired Driving on the Veterans Community

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According to the US Dept. of Veterans Affairs...

“MOTOR VEHICLE CRASHES ARE THE LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH IN VETERANS IN THE EARLY YEARS AFTER RETURNING HOME FROM DEPLOYMENT.”
Driving: Through the eyes of a Veteran.

Before some combat veterans even take a drink or touch a drug... their driving may already be affected by their military service.

“From 1999 through 2012, a period spanning peacetime and two wars, as many active-duty military personnel died in noncombat motor vehicle crashes both on and off duty (4,423) as were killed in the Iraq war (4,409).”
“Todd Nelson was an Army logistician riding in the front seat of a Toyota Land Cruiser in Kabul in August 2007 when a car in an adjoining lane blew up. He lost his right eye, broke both jaws and had burns on 18 percent of his body surface. He’s had 43 operations under general anesthesia.

When he was finally well enough to get back on the road, he drove for several months before his wife “made a comment about how aggressive I was being. She said, ‘You’re scaring me,’ ” Nelson, 40, recalled recently.

He sped. He hated letting cars get in front of him. He swerved whenever he saw a vehicle with a low-hanging rear end suggesting a heavy load. “Hey, I drove much worse than this over there and nothing happened,” he says he told himself.

“...he escaped injury. But he developed a habit of merciless attention to the road noticing every curb line repainted or jersey barrier moved that he’s never really lost.

“When I see a vehicle on the side of the road, it puts me on edge,” said Acheson, a senior at the University of Wisconsin at Platteville. “I am constantly scanning. If I see a bag blow across the road a mile up, I say, ‘What is that?’ ”

He has occasional and unaccountable moments of panic behind the wheel.”

Federal Veterans Programs

- US Department of Veterans Affairs Program
  
  **Veterans Safe Driving Initiative: Home Safe, Drive Safe, Stay Safe**
  
  [www.safedriving.va.gov](http://www.safedriving.va.gov)

- VA, DOT, & DoD are developing a Veterans Traffic Strategic Research Plan to focus on the needs of veterans transportation safety.

- VA & DOT are launching a Veterans’ Safe Driving Public Health Information Campaign to assist in reducing service member deaths from motor vehicle accidents.
Veterans Treatment Court Testimonial

From an OIF/OEF Combat Marine:

“I was accepted into the VTC program. Without the VTC I was facing 6 months in jail and close to $1,000 in fines. I was able to get all my fines waived and only have to complete 14 days in home incarceration. The most important part is the structure, support and accountability the VTC gives and holds you to while I will be going to recovery.

The groups help you get advice and support from fellow Veterans and a mentor is there to act as a guide for you. I have recently begun the program but the structure they provide will help get me through recovery and remain sober.”
Veterans Treatment
Testimonial

“To whom it may concern:

I owe my life to the Louisville VA and the Louisville Metro Police. Since getting out of the Marine Corps in 2006 I have had 6 DUIs and several alcohol related arrests. I was going through the motions of life; self-medicating to “feel” better. I was not living. I knew what I was but did not know what the question of “who are you” really meant. Prior to help from the VA, I always saw the negative in life. I was in survival mode. I feared the thought of fear. I was controlled by my deep routed secrets that I did not want to share with anyone, including my parents. I no longer see myself as a victim to a situation. I use to believe it was everyone else that was wrong and that they were the problem. I understand my power and control and that is why I have chosen to change my thinking. I am no longer a victim.

November of 2015 I lost my license creating more barriers to survive in today’s world. Transportation is freedom. I could have made excuses not to show up to my appointments over the past 2 years because I did not drive. But I refused to allow myself to be a victim and not get better.

Riding my bike has allowed me to see life differently. It has given me the time to think and heal. I have made many mistakes and could say that I have ruined my reputation but I choose not to focus on the negative. Riding my bike has allowed me the freedom to concentrate on my character and find what is meaningful to me. My reputation may have some flaws but if I continue to focus on my values and character, others will protect my reputation.

Thanks to the Louisville VA Mental Health for an outstanding team.

Semper Fi”
Veterans Treatment Testimonial

“Prior to joining the service I drank as any normal teenager might but my drinking substantially increased after joining the Army. When I joined I was young and impressionable and drinking was almost a daily routine. While in the service there were several things that helped me achieve both military rank and civilian education. Little did I know that these things would also contribute to my downfall after leaving the service. These things were discipline, structure, and accountability; along with a deep sense of comradery I had with my brothers.

After leaving my unit, I felt as though I was adrift and had no sense of purpose and had no sense of self being. I turned to alcohol as an every day fix to numb and replace the very same things that had driven me to a successful career. It was then that I was introduced to the Louisville VAMC. I become a regular visitor to the hospital for detox, sometimes having alcohol levels above .5. I was headed for death but the amazing people at the VA stepped in and helped me through the terrible times. I was referred to the inpatient program to begin my journey of recovery. While at I received not only group therapy but also one on one counseling to help sort out the true issues behind my chronic drinking. During the inpatient program I was also introduced to the compensated work therapy program or CWT. This program gave me back a sense of purpose, responsibility and comradery. After completing this program I was hired on at the VA fulltime, but was later forced to resign to resolve my legal issues from drinking. Dealing with these issues caused me a lot of stress and anxiety but luckily the VA was able to help again with their Legal Assistance Representative. The veterans outreach has been supportive and encouraging. Soon, I will be finished with a jail sentence and I hope to be released to the VA Courts where I know I will receive the continuing support, treatment, and accountability that will allow me to finish my transition to civilian life.

I look forward to becoming a VA employee so that I can help give back to my brothers and sisters in arms and to a program that has been so freely giving to me. I cannot say enough about the staff and services that the VA has given me. Thank you Louisville VA medical center.”
Why should we care about our veterans?

“LESS THAN 1% OF OUR POPULATION SERVES IN THE US ARMED FORCES TO PROTECT THE LIVES AND FREEDOMS OF THE OTHER 99%.”