THURSTON COUNTY DISTRICT COURT

MENTAL HEALTH COURT

&

VETERANS COURT

Therapeutic Program

**Participant Handbook**

Updated December 2022

This handbook is designed to provide you with information regarding the Mental Health Court & Veterans Court (MHC/VC) program. This handbook does not constitute a contract between you and MHC/VC program. These are guidelines to explain general policies and procedures. MHC/VC reserves the right to change these guidelines and to decide any matter based upon individual facts and circumstances.

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**Welcome**

Welcome to the Mental Health Court & Veterans Court (MHC/VC) therapeutic court program. This handbook is designed to provide an overview of what to expect as a participant in MHC/VC. It provides a basic outline of the program obligations and serves as a resource to reflect on as often as needed to ensure complete compliance with MHC/VC’s mission of promoting a healthy and productive lifestyle. If you’re uncertain about program requirements, please contact MHC/VC staff for help.

As a participant of MHC/VC, you will be expected to adhere to all instructions given to you by the Judge and the MHC/VC team. Also, you will be required to follow all treatment recommendations and fully commit to treatment planning developed by you and assigned treatment providers.

**Mission Statement**

The mission of Thurston County Mental Health and Veterans Court is to serve the community and increase public safety by monitoring, supporting, and holding accountable justice-involved individuals (with mental health diagnoses) in accessing treatment and improving their quality of life. We treat each participant with respect and dignity, thus empowering them to make positive changes in their life.

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**Contact Information**

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**Importance of Communication**

**How to Contact Mental Health and Veteran’s Court?**

Primary point of contact for the program is your care coordinator; you may call, text, leave a voicemail, or come to the courthouse during business hours (8:30 AM – 4:30 PM). If you decide to send your care coordinator a text, please be aware that messages aren’t guaranteed to be private; don’t text things you don’t want others to read. A good suggestion would be to text your care coordinator to set up a time for a phone call or set up a meeting.

**Good Communication**

Good communication is essential for success in Mental Health and Veteran’s Court. Some things to consider:

* Too much information is better than not enough.
* Care coordinators are open to talking about anything, no matter how small.
* If you’re unsure about something, call and ask your care coordinator.
* While we are not available over the weekend, if something happens, please call, and leave a message or text; it’s better we hear about situations from you rather than someone else!
* **Please be available via phone or text!** Please ensure that your phone number is always current; if your phone number changes, please notify your care coordinator immediately. If you know that you will be unavailable via phone for any given amount of time, please make arrangements with your care coordinator as soon as possible.

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**Program Obligations**

There are going to be three main focuses of your program: treatment, check ins with your care coordinator, and status hearings. Please see below for more detail about each.

***Treatment.*** The primary focus of the program is mental health treatment; you will be required to be engaged with treatment throughout the duration of the program. You may also be required to engage in additional services, i.e., substance use disorder treatment, domestic violence treatment, anger management, etc. For any services that you are required to engage in, the expectation will be for you to **get an assessment and follow treatment recommendations**. Once an assessment is scheduled with these services, you will be asked to sign a release of information (ROI) to allow for open communication between your care coordinator and treatment providers, which includes at least monthly status reports about your progress and engagement in services.

Please be aware that additional recommendations can be made throughout the program.

***Check Ins with Care Coordinator.*** You and your care coordinator will set a schedule for check ins between the two of you. At the beginning of the program, this is usually once (or more) per week as you transition into the program; the frequency can and will change throughout the program depending on your progress and engagement with all court obligations, as well as any issues that arise, or when extra support is needed. At least one formal check in between status hearings is required.

The intent of the check ins is to connect with your care coordinator about anything on your mind, any support for services you are engaged with, progress in services, and overall progress in the program. While you are not expected to divulge all the details of your private sessions during treatment, please be prepared to discuss what you have learned and how you are applying it your life!

Please feel free to call and chat with your care coordinator in-between scheduled check ins!

***Status hearings.*** Like check ins, your care coordinator will set a schedule for status hearings; these will be with the judge, your defense attorney, the prosecutor, your care coordinator, and other participants. At the beginning of the program, this is usually weekly as you transition into the program; frequency can and will change throughout the program depending on your progress and engagement with all court obligations, as well as any issues that arise, or when extra support is needed.

The intent of the status hearings is for the legal team (the judge, your defense attorney, and the prosecutor) to assess your overall progress in the program and to address issues as they arise. During these hearings, you will also have an opportunity to engage with each member of the team individually and ask any questions that are on your mind! As mentioned before, please be prepared to discuss what you have learned from treatment and how you are applying it to your life!

**Additional Program Obligations**

Please keep a copy of your Mental Health Court/Veteran’s Court contract for your records; you are expected to adhere to all the requirements set forth in this contract. This includes, but is not limited to:

* No criminal behavior.
* Reporting all police contact to your care coordinator as soon as possible.
* Maintain sobriety from alcohol, marijuana, and all illicit substances.
* Engage in sobriety monitoring (UAs) as directed by your care coordinator.
* Pay off all fines and fees imposed in your case (if this is a challenge, please contact your care coordinator to discuss options!).
* Clear all other legal obligations from other jurisdictions, including quashing warrants and clearing fines/fees.
* Complete 16 hours (2 days) of meaningful-to-you community service by the 18th month of the program (talk with your care coordinator about ideas for this requirement!) and talk about your experience in a status hearing after the 18th month.

**NOTE:** Your care coordinator keeps a copy of your signed contract. If you lost your copy, your care coordinator can get you another copy!

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**Courtroom Decorum**

We strive to create a comfortable atmosphere for all participants during status hearings; mental health and veteran’s court is much more relaxed than typical court. However, please keep the following in mind:

* Please be on time for all scheduled hearings. If something prevents you from being on time, please notify your care coordinator immediately; arrangements may be able to be made.
* Please be mindful of appropriate dress code.
* We encourage all participants to learn from each other’s experience; someone may provide valuable insight into a similar issue you are facing!
* Please keep your phone on silent; if you need to take an emergent call, please step outside of the courtroom. You are not allowed to be consumed with texting or playing mobile games during court.
* Please keep disruptions to a minimum.
* If court is held via ZOOM, you are required to keep cameras on throughout entire session, stay logged on for entire court session, no food, or drinks, and attending court while driving will not be allowed.

Participants are encouraged to bring friends, family, significant others, sponsors, etc. to court along with them! Please ensure that your guests understand the rules of courtroom decorum.

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**Sobriety Monitoring (UAs)**

We acknowledge that sobriety monitoring is a difficult challenge for many participants in the program; it takes a lot of time and effort to complete this requirement. All participants are required to engage in sobriety monitoring, even if there is no diagnosed substance use disorder.

Sobriety monitoring is conducted randomly; the frequency will be determined by your care coordinator and will be based on clinical reasoning.

When you entered the program, you signed the *Mandatory UA Agreement* form; please keep a copy of this for your records and refer to it frequently! You agree to a lot when you sign this document, and there is a lot of information, including the window of time to provide your UA. If you lost your copy, your care coordinator can get you another copy!

Please call the UA line every day, including holidays and weekends! Calling the UA line is the only way to determine if you are scheduled for a UA that day; forgetting to call might mean forgetting to attend a UA! While this may sound simple, even the best of us can forget or get distracted, so please ensure that you establish a solid routine that includes making this call!

Please be mindful that UAs must be considered “valid” to be counted. Here are some examples of non-valid UAs:

* *Dilute UAs.* These are typically caused by drinking too much liquid prior to providing your UA; while this amount varies for each individual, it’s recommended to limit liquids to 20 oz or less prior to providing your UA.
* *Leaked UAs*. These are typically caused by not tightening the lid after you provide your sample. Please be sure to follow all instructions by the staff collecting your UA to avoid this situation!
* *Insufficient quantity*. If the sample doesn’t reach the top of the temperature strip on the UA container, there will be insufficient quantity to test. Please be sure to follow all instructions by the staff collecting your UA to avoid this situation!

**NOTE:** While we acknowledge there are foods, medicines, and other substances that can cause a false positive on your UAs, it’s difficult – if not impossible - to distinguish false positives from true positives. Ultimately you are responsible for everything that you put into your body. If you have questions about anything that might cause a false positive, talk to your care coordinator ***before*** providing your UA sample!

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**Graduation**

Mental Health Court/Veterans Court is a **24-month program**. At the end of the program, there will be a graduation ceremony to celebrate your accomplishment! You are expected to complete the following requirements throughout the program to graduate:

* Remain fully engaged with mental health treatment throughout the program.
* Successfully complete substance use disorder treatment and domestic violence treatment, if ordered by the court.
* Not have any infractions within the last six months prior to graduation.
	+ ***NOTE: Any infraction within the last six months extends your graduation date to adhere to this requirement.***
* Address all outstanding legal issues in all jurisdictions, including quashing outstanding warrants and paying any and all fines/fees.
* Complete two days (16 hours) of community service by the 18th month and talk about your experience at a status hearing after your 18th month.
* Complete your written graduation plan.

Graduation can seem like a long way away, though it often comes quicker than expected! It’s highly recommended to start talking with your care coordinator about your written response to the graduation plan and think about your answers throughout the duration of the program!

For the formal graduation ceremony, you are highly encouraged to bring friends, family, significant others, sponsors, etc.! For those who can’t attend in person, the ceremony is broadcasted on Zoom and YouTube; ask your care coordinator for the Zoom info or the YouTube link!

After graduation, we highly encourage participants to continue to stay connected to the court and visit occasionally (or more often!) and to stay in contact with their care coordinator! We also have a mentor program for graduates to give back to the program and help with new participants and are always looking for more volunteer mentors! Talk to your care coordinator about opportunities!

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**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**

***Can I go on vacation or away for the weekend while in the program?***

We strive to look for ways to grant this request, though it depends on your overall progress in the program. As soon as you start to make plans, contact your care coordinator as soon as possible. Ultimately, the decision will be up to the legal team (the judge, defense attorney, and the prosecutor). For all travel, sobriety monitoring must be arranged in advance.

***What is the community service requirement? Where can I complete community service?***

Throughout the program, you will complete 2 days (16-hours) of community service; these hours don’t have to be consecutive (i.e., two 8-hour days, four 4-hour days, eight 2-hour days are all acceptable). These hours must be completed by the 18th month of the program, and then you will be asked to speak about your experience at your next status hearing.

You are free to complete the community service wherever you see fit, as long as it is meaningful to you and gives back to the community in some way. The intent is that the community has invested in you through this program, therefore, we want you to pay back that investment. When you speak about your experience during your status hearing, you will be asked why this community service was meaningful to you.

If you are unsure about ideas for community service, speak with your care coordinator for ideas!

***Is it possible to do UAs closer to where I live or at different times throughout the day?***

We are always looking to expand options for sobriety monitoring, as we want to make this easier and more accessible for all participants! Two requirements for sobriety monitoring (UAs) is that they must be observed and must be lab tested to confirm results; not all locations meet these requirements. Some options ***might*** be available, particularly if you are engaged in substance use disorder treatment. Talk with your care coordinator about your specific situation to determine if any additional options are available to you!

***Can I get my no-contact order lifted while I’m in the program?***

Your care coordinator can certainly advocate for you, but ultimately you will have to speak with your attorney about options to get any no contact order on your case lifted.

***What does “on the record” mean during status hearings?***

Status hearings ***is*** court. All hearings are recorded for a perpetual memory and can be reviewed later.

***Can I go to school or work while I’m in the program?***

Yes! There is no expectation for you to put your life on hold while you are in the program. However, it will be your responsibility to ensure that you are able to meet all the program obligations throughout the program; if work or school interferes, you must prioritize your court obligations.

**NOTE:** If you work in an environment that serves alcohol, this must be approved by the judge!

***I’m not diagnosed with a substance use disorder; why do I have to engage in sobriety monitoring (UAs)?***

Sobriety monitoring is a standard requirement for all diversion programs throughout the country, including therapeutic courts. Additionally, even if you’ve never been diagnosed with a substance use disorder, maintaining sobriety is essential for stability and is crucial for mental health.

***What happens if I get infraction?***

The process starts with your care coordinator having a conversation with you to gather the facts and report back to the legal team (judge, defense attorney, and prosecutor), as well as to make recommendations about goal-oriented therapeutic interventions, if applicable; a status hearing will be scheduled for the next available session. Then you will have an opportunity to speak privately with your defense attorney.

During your status hearing, the prosecutor will make a recommendation based on the facts presented by the care coordinator and your defense attorney will make a statement and request based on your private conversation.

**NOTE:** The recommendation from the prosecutor may be different than what the care coordinator presents.

The judge will then decide what action to take; this action may include imposing the goal-oriented therapeutic intervention, may include community service, may include a jail sanction, or may include termination from the program.

**NOTE:** If you are facing an infraction, it’s highly encouraged you speak openly and honestly with your care coordinator and contact your defense attorney as soon as possible.

***What medications am I allowed to take to avoid false positives on the UAs?***

You are required to provide all prescription medication information to your care coordinator to keep in your records. You cannot take old prescriptions such as narcotics that were prescribed for a prior injury or prescribed medications for someone else. You can take most over the counter medications as long as they do not contain alcohol or THC. Additionally, please complete an *at-risk acknowledgement form* with your provider and ensure it is submitted to your care coordinator. Also, refer to the *safe drug list* for extra guidance regarding over the counter and prescribed medications.

**NOTE:** Some medications may result in a false positive in a UA and it’s difficult – if not impossible – to distinguish a false positive. Ultimately, you are responsible for everything you put in your body, therefore, it’s ***highly recommended*** to read all the labels prior to taking ***any*** medications. If there are any questions, please contact your care coordinator ***prior*** taking the medication(s).

***What happens if I am prescribed opioids or narcotics for dental work or surgery while I’m in the program?***

Any time you receive any prescribed medications, send a copy of the prescription (i.e., taking a picture of the label or sending in a copy of the prescription order) to your care coordinator. If you are prescribed an opioid or narcotic while in the program, work with your care coordinator about how this will affect your sobriety monitoring and, on a plan, to monitor the appropriate use of these medications.

**NOTE:** In addition to contacting your care coordinator about all prescribed medications, if you are diagnosed with a substance use disorder, there is an additional form for your prescriber to complete for opioid or narcotic medications; contact your care coordinator for more details.

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**APPENDIX**

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**Receipt and Review of Participant Handbook**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Case No.: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

I, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, acknowledge the receipt of the Thurston County District Court Mental Health Court/Veterans Court Participant Handbook. By my signature below, I attest that I have been provided with a copy of the Participant Handbook and that I have thoroughly reviewed it prior to agreeing to participant in MHC/VC program. Furthermore, I acknowledge that I have been made aware of MHC/VC program requirements and responsibilities.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Participant Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date