

JAILS ARE NOT TREATMENT CENTERS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Currently, in Minnesota alone, there are more individuals with severe mental illness being incarcerated than hospitalized.⁹ Blue Earth County's Yellow Line Project (YLP) reported that 83.7% of individuals screened positive for mental illness prior to being booked into jail. Not only does incarcerating individuals with mental illness fill our jails, it prolongs mental illness and time spent away from treatment.⁹

Jail diversion programs divert individuals with mental health disorders from the criminal justice system and into appropriate treatment when applicable. For those individuals ineligible for diversion from the criminal justice system, care coordination would be ideal to assist in finding appropriate treatment and to assist the person in accessing other preventative healthy care services.⁹ Care coordination would be most beneficial if paired with law enforcement and human services at a county or regional level.

Jail recidivism rates have dropped significantly since the introduction of care coordinators within the criminal justice system. While some larger county jails host jail diversion programs, many county or regional jails do not. Without jail diversion programs

and coordination of care workers, jails have become default treatment facilities these suffering individuals.

"THESE PEOPLE ARE WITHERING AWAY AND SUFFERING IN JAIL FOR NO GOOD REASON."

- Rich Stanek, Hennepin County Sheriff
Star Tribune, March 2, 2018



A LOOK AT THIS BRIEF:

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Mental illness is nothing to be ashamed of. It is a medical problem, just like heart disease or diabetes. Mental illnesses are health conditions involving changes in thinking, emotion or behavior (or a combination of these). Mental illnesses are associated with distress and/or problems functioning in social, work or family activities.

THE PROBLEM

Everyday in the United States, there are many individuals with mental health disorders booked into jail, resulting in unnecessary jailing and in overcrowding of the criminal justice system. More than one million individuals diagnosed with a serious mental illness are criminally detained every year.⁴ When individuals experience a mental health crisis and are picked up by law enforcement, they are more likely to go to jail than receive the mental health services. While in jail, these individuals do not receive the treatment they need for their mental illness, and they are more like to serve longer sentences.⁹

Following jail sentencing, persons with mental illness rarely have coordination of services or healthcare benefits, therefore, they often find themselves homeless, in the hospital, or reoffending and back in jail.⁹ The U.S. Department of Justice reports that the number of jail inmates who meet the threshold for SPD (Serious Psychological Distress) was five times higher than the number of individuals who meet the threshold for SPD in the total general U.S. population.

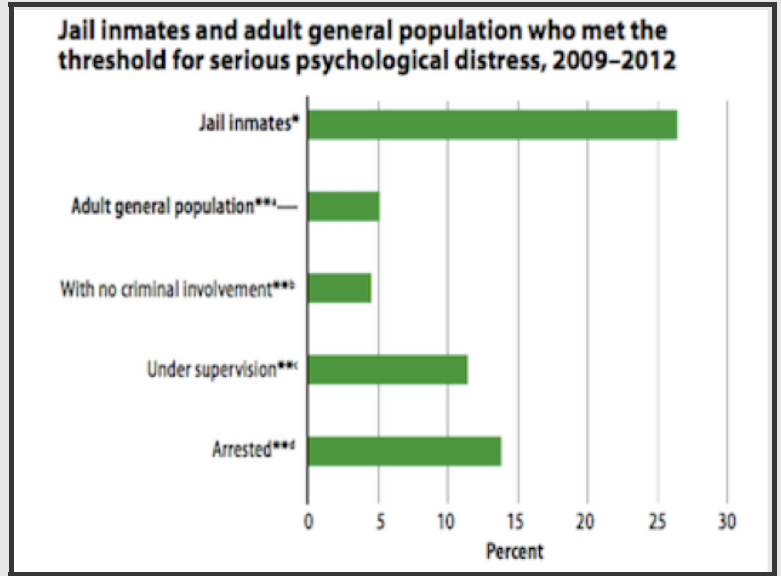


Figure 1. U.S. Department of Justice identifies the number of individuals with serious psychological distress (SPD) who are incarcerated versus in the general population



"Jail intervention before a person crosses the 'Yellow Line' to be booked into jail for untreated mental illness which is devastating to individuals, families and friends. Diversion includes Human Services and Law Enforcement working together to get individuals the right services at the right time."¹²

CURRENT POLICIES

In 2014, the state legislature developed a bipartisan task-force to examine mental health needs of offenders on various levels.⁶ Recommendations receiving more than 46% are: sustainable funding for urgent care services, encouraging consistent communication between mental health and law enforcement, continued medication after discharge, and sustainable funding for mobile crisis services.⁶ In 2017, the Yellow Line Project worked closely with state legislators to pass a bill that would cover services such as coordination of care for individuals with mental health disorders, substance use, social, economic, housing and others to reduce the use of jails.⁸ Current legislation on file states that counties can utilize jail diversion programs, but they must meet the requirements set forth by the Chapter 95.⁵

JAIL DIVERSION PROGRAMS

Jail diversion programs divert individuals with mental health disorders from the criminal justice system and into appropriate treatment when applicable. Many law enforcement officers have undergone the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training, which instructs officers to safely deescalate a mental health crisis and connect individuals to local mental health resources.⁹ Another option individuals with mental health disorders can utilize is mental health courts. Mental health courts provide individuals whose criminal acts are driven by mental illness an opportunity to enter into court-supervised treatment instead of jail.⁹ Minnesota has three mental health courts: Hennepin County, Ramsey County, and one in Duluth. Lastly, a newly funded jail diversion program is the Yellow Line Project (YLP) in Blue Earth County. The Yellow Line Project allows the individuals brought into the jail intake area to be assessed by a trained social worker and, if they qualify, can be offered alternative options before being booked into jail.¹² These particular programs strive to increase service options and solutions, access to healthcare and treatment, and working relationships between law enforcement and human services.¹²

COORDINATION OF CARE

A coordination of care worker within the jail system is usually a social worker who works directly with the individuals suffering from mental illness with more severe criminal charges. The jail's coordination of care worker also connects with the inmate's case manager, district attorney, probation officer, etc. to ensure continuity of care. When individuals with serious mental illnesses attempt to reenter the community from jail, they face major challenges in accessing treatment, housing, employment and other

SINCE BUILDING HER POSITION FROM THE GROUND UP IN AUGUST 2017, JODI PRICHARD, THE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES COORDINATOR WITHIN THE HENNEPIN COUNTY JAIL, REPORTS RECIDIVISM RATES HAVE DROPPED 62%.

necessary resources.⁹ Coordination of care workers help individuals arrange these resources before release from incarceration. Having these specific workers significantly reduces the recidivism rate for individuals with mental health disorders.

BARRIERS

- The biggest barrier to implementing jail diversion programs or coordination of care workers within every county jail is the funding needed to run these programs. Counties that have already begun these programs have received state grants worth up to \$500,000. Over time, however, data show that these programs save the community money by reintegrating these individuals back into the workforce and families.
- Providers and treatment options in rural MN are limited. While successful diversion is critical, the known shortages in the rural mental health must also be addressed. However, there exist numerous models rural communities have used in overcoming mental health workforce challenges.

IMPORTANCE

- Bridging the gap between human services and the criminal justice system is imperative in ensuring the best possible care for all individuals. While working as one, the criminal justice system and human services and set forth to lend a helping hand to those individuals suffering with mental health disorders within the jail systems.
- Early access to appropriate treatment for mental health symptoms is paramount when we look at long-term recovery outcomes. We know the importance of prevention when it comes to physical health. Routine checkups, screenings, and general awareness can be effective strategies for identifying risks or early diagnosis. The same idea is true of mental illness. When treatment focuses only on later, more serious stages of mental illness, it is costly to the individual, their family, and the community at large. Early identification and intervention can prevent serious impairment including unemployment, homelessness, poverty, and suicide.

"BEING MENTALLY ILL IS NOT A CRIME."



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that the state of Minnesota provide funding to each of the 87 counties to assist in the development and implementation of jail diversion programs. With all county jails either having jail diversion programs or a coordination of care worker, every suffering individual will have a chance to better their life.
- It is recommended that every county or regional jail have access to a social worker to ensure care of inmates at discharge. In large, this coordination worker will help support the individual reintegrate into the community smoothly.
- It is recommended that all law enforcement officers be trained in Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training to prevent persons with severe mental illness from entering the criminal justice system. These options would have a positive effect on recidivism rates and ultimately reduce the stressors that plague the corrections system.

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