



BJA Bureau of Justice Assistance

MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVES IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

People with mental illness are significantly overrepresented in the segment of the population in contact with the criminal justice system. Approximately 5 percent of the U.S. population has a serious mental illness, while according to a 1999 Bureau of Justice Statistics report, about 16 percent of the population in prison or jail has a serious mental illness. Of the 10 million people booked into U.S. jails in 1997, at least 700,000 had a serious mental illness; approximately three-quarters of those individuals had co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders. For juveniles, in a study completed by the National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice, two-thirds of detained male youth and three-quarters of detained female youth have at least one mental health disorder.

BJA recognizes that the involvement of people with mental illness in the justice system is an important issue for state and local governments and that many people with mental illness cycle through the justice system, often for low-level crimes, without receiving needed mental health or other treatment services. BJA realizes the importance of finding solutions and supports for these people and the need to span the entire justice continuum—from initial contact with law enforcement to courts to reentry into the community. Through initiatives such as the Mental Health Courts, Law Enforcement/Mental Health Partnership, and Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Programs, BJA increases access to services for people with mental illness or co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders in the criminal justice system by:

- Promoting communication, collaboration, and intergovernmental partnerships.
- Implementing cross-discipline training, coordination, and planning.
- Increasing the expertise of local and state government, federal agencies, and others working with people with mental illnesses or co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders.
- Through evidence-based practices, reducing the frequency with which people with mental illness or co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders come into contact with the justice system.
- Enhancing public safety and public health and confidence in the justice system.
- Improving the safety of law enforcement staff.
- Increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of courts and the mental health system.
- Providing treatment and transitional services for incarcerated persons or transitional reentry programs for those released from any penal or correctional institution.

BJA works to increase public safety through cross-system collaboration with other federal agencies to effectively address the challenges faced by people with mental illnesses or co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders in the criminal justice system. BJA partners with the National Institute of Corrections, the Office of Justice Programs' Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. BJA has entered into a memorandum of understanding with these federal agencies to provide a framework for planning, coordinating, and sharing the design and implementation strategy of interagency efforts.

Under the Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Act (MIOTCRA), signed into law in 2004 and reauthorized in 2008, BJA administers the Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program, a grant program that helps state and local communities improve services for justice-involved adults and juveniles with mental illnesses or co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders, and also supports programs improving law enforcement responses to people with mental illnesses.

More information on the Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program can be found online at www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA/grant/JMHCprogram.html. For information on BJA's mental health initiatives in the criminal justice system, contact Rebecca Rose, BJA Policy Advisor for Substance Abuse and Mental Health, at (202) 514-0726 or Rebecca.Rose@usdoj.gov.