

Ohio Steps Up for People with Mental Illness in Jail

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In 2006, the Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that more than half of all prison and jail inmates had a mental health problem. These numbers included 56% of state prisoners, 45% of federal prisoners, and 64% of local jail inmates. Data were based on inmate self-reporting of experiences with mania, major depression, and psychotic disorders—such as delusions or hallucinations—up to one year prior to being surveyed.

County and state leaders of Ohio met in June to discuss how to reduce the number of people with mental illness in jail. The meeting took place as part of the Stepping Up partnership launched in May 2015 between the Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center, the National Association of Counties, and the American Psychiatric Association Foundation.

The Buckeye State gathering served as a follow-up to a national Stepping Up Summit in April which brought together leaders from across the country. Ohio is the first state in the nation to follow through with a state-level meeting.

"Ohio's counties are leveraging the national momentum of Stepping Up to make progress here at home," said Tracy Plouck, Director of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, President of the Board of the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, and former NRI Board Member.

The Ohio meeting served as a useful springboard for communications between county, state and national figures. "Our Stepping Up Ohio summit provided an excellent opportunity for local leaders to hear directly from Dr. Fred Osher, Director of Health Systems and Services Policy at the CSG Justice Center, who is a national expert," Plouck explained. "At the same gathering, attendees gained insight into some initiatives that are already underway in Ohio to expand diversion programs, jail-based treatment and re-entry resources," she added.

Stakeholders from 23 Ohio counties gathered at the Ohio Stepping Up Summit including treatment providers, elected officials, law enforcement officials and jail administrators. Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine and Plouck also spoke.

"Our next phase will focus on technical assistance for these counties as progress is made according to their local priorities for improvement," explained Plouck. Participating counties are receiving access to an online toolkit which includes a series of webinars, resources, planning tools, technical assistance and distance-learning opportunities.