THE STEPPING UP INITIATIVE

A National Initiative to Reduce the Number of People with Mental Illnesses in Jails

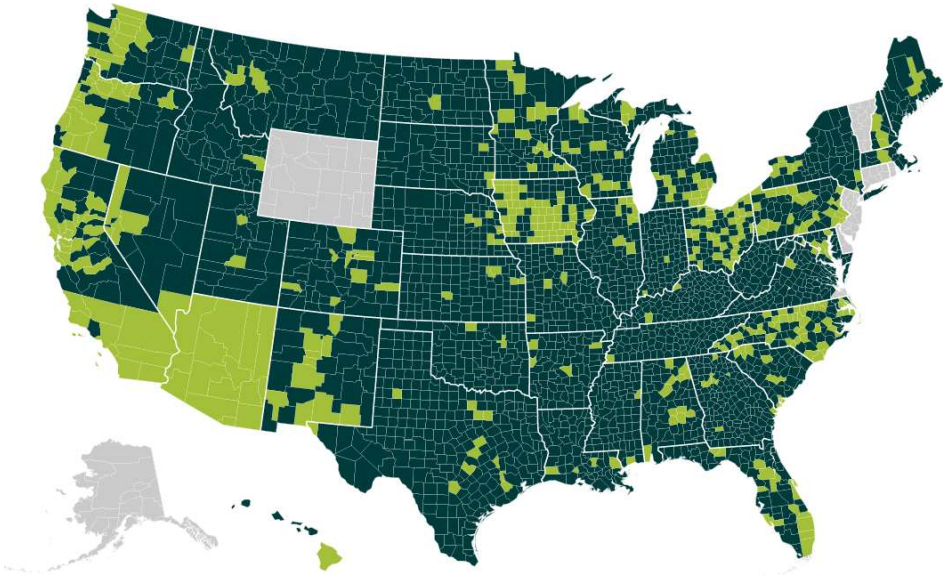
An estimated 2 million people with serious mental illnesses—almost three-quarters of whom also have substance use disorders—are booked into local jails each year. Federal and state policy and funding barriers, along with limited opportunities for law enforcement training and arrest alternatives in many communities, have made county and other local jails the de facto mental health hospitals for people who cannot access appropriate community-based mental health treatment and services. Counties recognize the need for systems-level change to help them better link people to treatment and services while improving public safety in fiscally responsible and effective ways. The publication *Reducing the Number of People with Mental Illnesses in Jail: Six Questions County Leaders Need to Ask*, which was released January 2017, provides a planning framework for counties to address these challenges and help reduce the number of people with mental illnesses who continue to cycle through the criminal justice system.

The National Initiative

Recognizing the critical role local and state officials play in supporting systems change, the National Association of Counties (NACo), the American Psychiatric Association Foundation and The Council of State Governments Justice Center launched the Stepping Up initiative in May 2015. Stepping Up is a national movement to provide counties with the tools they need to develop cross-systems, data-driven strategies that can lead to measurable reductions in the number of people with mental illnesses and co-occurring disorders in jails.

More than 425 counties have passed a resolution or proclamation to participate in the initiative. With support from public and private entities, the initiative builds on the many innovative and proven practices being implemented across the country. Stepping Up engages a diverse group of organizations with expertise on these issues, including those representing sheriffs, jail administrators, judges, community corrections professionals, treatment providers, people with mental illnesses and their families, mental health and substance use program directors and other stakeholders.

COUNTY RESOLUTIONS RECEIVED AS OF MAY 1, 2018



The initiative supports counties in developing and adopting a cross-systems action plan through strategies such as:

- Providing a small number of counties with intensive technical assistance that includes onsite work to help use the planning framework, implement evidence-based practices and demonstrate strategies that result in measurable change
- Providing counties with broad-based technical assistance for applying the planning framework through webinars, network calls and other information-sharing opportunities
- Assisting states that support counties' efforts to implement the Stepping Up framework statewide; and
- Promoting federal policies that support counties' efforts to reduce the prevalence of people with mental illnesses in jails.

Stepping Up Framework

Reducing the Number of People with Mental Illnesses in Jail: Six Questions County Leaders Need to Ask (Six Questions) represents foundational thinking of the Stepping Up initiative that encourages counties to assess their existing efforts to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in jail by considering the following questions:

1. **Is our leadership committed?**
2. **Do we conduct timely screening and assessments?**
3. **Do we have baseline data?**
4. **Do we conduct a comprehensive process analysis and inventory of services?**
5. **Have we prioritized policy, practice and funding improvements?**
6. **Do we track progress?**

Stepping Up urges county leaders to review current practices and to adopt policies, programs and practices that are informed by their impact on the following measures:

- **Reducing the number of people with mental illnesses booked into jail**
- **Reducing the length of time spent in jail**
- **Increasing connections to treatment**
- **Reducing recidivism**

Stepping Up Resources

The Stepping Up partners have developed an online toolkit with a wealth of resources that are continuously updated to provide the latest information on research and best practices to counties. Resources are all publicly available on the Stepping Up website and include:

- **Monthly webinars and networking calls**
- **A project coordinator handbook**
- **Educational workshops at NACo and partner conferences**
- **Guidance on measuring the number of people with mental illnesses in jail**
- **Quarterly calls of smaller networking groups of rural, mid-size and large/urban counties that have passed Stepping Up resolutions**
- **Written and online tools that are companions to the *Six Questions* report that present the latest research and case studies for county officials**

To learn more or join the initiative please visit StepUpTogether.org

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of COUNTIES NACo

AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION FOUNDATION

CSG Justice Center THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS

BJA Bureau of Justice Assistance U.S. Department of Justice