

jail diversion

Jails and prisons hold disproportionate numbers of people with mental illness... we need to find a better way.



- In a mental health crisis, people are more likely to encounter police than get medical help. Police officers routinely provide the first line of crisis response for situations involving individuals with mental illnesses. As a result, 2 million people with mental illness are booked into jails each year.
- Nearly 15% of men and 30% of women booked into jails have a serious mental health condition.
- Approximately 20% of state prisoners and 21% of local jail prisoners have “a recent history” of a mental health condition.
- Jailing people with mental illness creates huge burdens on law enforcement, corrections and state and local budgets. It does not protect public safety. And people who could be helped are being ignored.
- At least 83% of jail inmates with a mental illness did not have access to needed treatment.
- They are at risk of victimization and often their mental health conditions get worse, not better. They also stay longer than their counterparts without mental illness.
- After leaving jail, many individuals no longer have access to needed healthcare and benefits. Without access to mental health services and supports, many wind up homeless, in emergency rooms and often rearrested.
- An estimated 26% of homeless adults staying in shelters live with serious mental illness and an estimated 46% live with severe mental illness and/or substance use disorders. In turn, they are at risk for another mental health crisis or run-in with law enforcement that could possibly lead to rearrest.
- For most ex-offenders, their prison records remain public and are impediments to employment for the rest of their lives. Having a prison or felony record is one of the most serious barriers to employment, making ex-offender populations extremely difficult to place and sustain in full-time employment.

1) Jailing People with Mental Illness. Retrieved October 10, 2016, from <http://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Public-Policy/Jailing-People-with-Mental-Illness>