

Statewide Strategic Plan to guide Pennsylvania's response to people with mental illnesses involved with the criminal justice system

Throughout 2008 DPW and OMHSAS leadership participated on a Commission of Justice Initiatives, Mental Health Task Force convened at the request of former Supreme Court Chief Justice Cappy. The group considered the challenges to all branches and levels of government when people with mental illness interact with the justice system. Utilizing the Sequential Intercept Model to frame the inquiry, and partnering with the Council of State Governments and other state agencies, focus groups and personal interviews confirmed a set of assumptions and recommendations and developed the report titled " Developing a statewide, strategic plan to guide Pennsylvania's response to people with mental illnesses involved with the criminal justice system." The full report is found on the PaRecovery web site link:

http://www.parecovery.org/documents/Adult_Justice_Strategic_Plan.pdf

The Strategic Plan Report includes the following recommendations:

1. A Criminal Justice Mental Health Advisory Committee will be created to provide guidance and structure to the activities described below, to ensure that Pennsylvania's criminal justice/mental health activities are coordinated across the state, and to ensure counties receive the guidance and support necessary to implement effective responses. In partnership with DPW/OMHSAS, the Advisory Committee will be incorporated into the committee structure of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) and will include representatives from state agencies, county leadership, the courts, district attorneys, public defenders; consumers and families, and other criminal justice and mental health advocates and practitioners from across the Commonwealth. The Committee will be chaired by the Honorable John Zottola from Allegheny County.

2. A Center of Excellence for the Development and Improvement of Programs Serving Adults with Mental Illness Involved in the Criminal Justice System (CoE) will be established through a grant to the successful applicant of a funding announcement due to PCCD May 29, 2009.

(<http://www.pccd.state.pa.us/pccd/cwp/view.asp?A=1430&Q=578084>) A subgroup of the Advisory Committee will comprise the review committee. The CoE will support statewide strategies identified in the strategic plan, will promote the proliferation of evidence-based and promising practices by providing technical assistance in support of the start up, operation and sustainability of jail diversion and re-entry programs and will act as a clearinghouse for information and resources related to criminal justice, mental health, and substance abuse. Activities and priorities of the Center of Excellence will be guided by the Advisory Committee.

3. The Criminal Justice/Mental Health Competitive Grant Program will be formalized and expanded to build on the joint initiative of 2008-2009 that funded the start up and enhancement of 9 mental health courts. The Grant Program is an initiative of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) and OMHSAS formalized through a Letter of Agreement. Grant announcements specific to jail diversion or re-entry programs for individuals with mental illness or co-occurring disorders will be developed, awarded and administered through the Criminal Justice Mental Health Advisory Committee structure.

4. In order to identify best practices related to re-entry programs, there is a need for a focused initiative that will grant funds to pilot counties to develop local re-entry plans. The Strategic Plan Report examined the number and service needs of state inmates from 5 counties as examples and projected the potential cost savings associated with early parole and decreased recidivism through comprehensive aftercare planning and access to services. Funds will be requested to identify several counties to pilot a re-entry initiative focusing on access to income supports and entitlements, and then to replicate the initiatives statewide.