

JAILS:

Asylums of the New Millennium

Fifty years ago, the U.S. Supreme Court ordered the deinstitutionalization of state psychiatric patients with the expectation that the states would provide adequate community-based treatment. Instead of realizing the high court's vision, Florida, like many states, neglected to build and fund a comprehensive system of community treatment and supports. As a result, over 92,000 adults with serious and persistent mental illnesses and 79,000 children with serious emotional disturbances in Florida are not receiving the publicly funded treatment services they need.

Instead, Florida replaced state psychiatric hospitals with state and local correctional institutions. In 1955, state psychiatric hospitals housed 560,000 people nationwide. Today, only 60,000 people with mental illnesses are in state hospitals, but another 300,000 are in jail or prisons and many more are living on the streets.

The result has been devastating for people with mental illnesses, their families and our communities, and has placed a dangerous, inappropriate and expensive burden on law enforcement.

Ironically, rather than liberating people with mental illnesses from institutions, deinstitutionalization coupled with the state's failure to provide adequate community care has merely moved the warehousing of patients from hospitals to jails. As a result, our public safety is threatened, critical tax dollars are being wasted, and we have made mental illness a crime.

Without an adequate system of treatment and care, having a mental illness has, in effect, become a crime at a great cost to taxpayers.

Jails: The “institutions” of today

- Nearly one in four inmates in Florida jails has a mental illness – a three-fold increase since 1992.¹
- More than 10,000 people in Florida jails have a severe mental illness – almost five times as many people as in state psychiatric hospitals.²

- Half of all youths in Florida’s juvenile justice commitment programs have been diagnosed with a severe mental illness.¹

A burden for law enforcement

- Inmates with a mental illness are up to six times more expensive to care for than other inmates, and their average length of incarceration is significantly longer.³
- Between 1997 and 2000, the number of Florida counties where all Baker Act certificates were issued by law enforcement officers increased from 1 county to 31 counties. That means that in nearly half of Florida counties, law enforcement officers, rather than mental health professionals, are the first responders for people with mental illnesses who are in crisis.⁴
- In 2000, there were 34 percent more Baker Act cases (80,869) than DUI arrests (60,337).⁵
- Florida law enforcement officers initiate about 100 Baker Act cases a day – comparable to the number of aggravated assault arrests (111 per day) and 40 percent more than the number of burglary arrests (71 per day).⁵

Law enforcement at risk

- Law enforcement officers were put at risk in 30,000 Baker Act instances where there was a “real and present threat of substantial harm.”⁶
- At least 271 – and possibly as many as 451 – officers were injured in altercations with people with severe mental illnesses.⁷

People with untreated mental illnesses at risk

- In 1998, one out of five cases – nationwide – in which a person with mental illnesses was fatally shot by law enforcement occurred in Florida. (Eight of 35 documented cases.)⁸
- In Miami-Dade County alone, seven people with mental illnesses were fatally shot in the last two years.⁹
- At least 22,000 homeless people in Florida have a mental illness.¹⁰
- Seventy-two percent of people who commit suicide have serious mental illnesses.¹¹
- Individuals with severe mental illnesses are two and a half times more likely to be attacked, raped or mugged than the general population.¹²

Failure to treat mental illnesses is expensive

- It costs \$107,000 per year to treat just one patient in a state mental hospital.¹³

- A two-year study of the Chicago-based Bridges Program found that mental health treatment of felony offenders reduced jail times and hospital stays by 80 percent to 90 percent, resulting in significant savings for state hospitals and county jails.¹⁴
- A recent study of California's Community Mental Health Treatment Program (similar to Florida's FACT teams) found significant reductions in hospital and incarceration rates in the first 12 months of treatment.³
- The State could provide medications and community treatment for 10 people with mental illnesses for the amount it costs to jail or hospitalize a single person for a year.¹³
- Miami-Dade alone spends \$4 million a year on overtime pay for correctional officers resulting from cases of inmates with mental illnesses.¹⁵
- A five-year study by the University of Pennsylvania found it costs basically the same to provide adequate housing and treatment for individuals with mental illnesses as it does to do nothing. Researchers found the cost to keep a person in jail several weeks and then release him back to the streets is indistinguishable from the cost of providing a transitional program with supportive housing and treatment.¹⁶
- Every \$1 invested in mental health treatment saves \$3-\$8 in reduced criminal activity and hospitalizations.¹⁷
- The daily crisis hospitalization costs for Baker Act cases are \$239 to \$279 per day. There were 80,869 Baker Act cases last year alone in Florida.¹³

Widespread illness, long wait for treatment

- Over 92,000 adults with serious and persistent mental illnesses and 79,000 children with serious emotional disturbances in Florida are not receiving the publicly funded treatment services they need.¹⁸
- Only 40 percent of adults and 33 percent of children with mental illnesses who depend on publicly funded services receive treatment.¹³
- Of urban communities in the U.S., Miami-Dade County has the largest percentage of people with mental illnesses – 9.1 percent or approximately 200,000 people. Yet only 13 percent of those who need treatment receive it.¹³
- The waiting list for Florida's forensic psychiatric hospitals routinely exceeds 100, resulting in significant delays in transferring jail inmates for court-ordered treatment.¹³

Recommendations

- Expand comprehensive community mental health services statewide for adults and children. The State is implementing a redesign of the adult mental health system in the 18 counties served by G. Pierce Wood State Hospital, in the wake of the hospital's closing. Florida Partners in Crisis is calling to expand that redesign statewide.
- Increase community forensic services to divert defendants with mental illnesses from state hospitals and county jails.

- Increase funding for medications through the indigent psychiatric drug program, which provides mental health medications to people who don't qualify or are awaiting eligibility to the Medicaid program.

Sources

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