

Task Force for Criminal Justice Collaboration on Mental Health Issues Final Report Summary



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
OF THE COURTS

JUDICIAL AND COURT OPERATIONS
SERVICES DIVISION

CENTER FOR FAMILIES, CHILDREN & THE COURTS

October 2013

The Task Force for Criminal Justice Collaboration on Mental Health Issues was established by former Chief Justice Ronald George, and its members were appointed in February 2008 as part of a national project designed to assist state judicial leaders in their efforts to improve responses to people with mental illnesses in the criminal justice system. The task force was charged with exploring ways to improve practices and procedures in cases involving adult and juvenile offenders with mental illness, ensuring the fair and expeditious administration of justice, and promoting improved access to treatment for defendants with mental illness in the criminal justice system. The task force identified problem areas and created recommendations that address all facets of the criminal justice system and provide guidelines for developing effective responses to people with mental illness in the criminal justice system. The task force report was finalized in April 2011 after wide circulation of the report for public comment and just before the 2011 Criminal Justice Realignment Act was enacted.

Identifying Problem Areas

The first challenge of the task force was to identify the needs of court-related programs and services that address offenders with mental illness in adult and juvenile courts. This was done using the Sequential Intercept Model, which is a framework for understanding how people with mental illness interact with the criminal justice system and presents the interaction as a series of points where interventions can be made to prevent a person from entering or becoming further entangled in the justice system. The task force studied the myriad of issues related to responding to offenders with mental illness along the justice continuum from early intervention through reentry and community postincarceration. The task force heard from representatives of model programs, experts in mental health treatment and law, and the public and family members of individuals with mental illness who are involved in the justice system.

Key Recommendation Areas

After careful study of the problem areas identified, the task force developed 137 recommendations that focus primarily in the following seven areas:

1. Community-based services and early intervention strategies that reduce the number of individuals with mental illness who enter the criminal justice system.
2. Court responses that enhance case-processing practices for cases of defendants with mental illness and reduce recidivism for this population.
3. Policies and procedures of correctional facilities that ensure appropriate mental health treatment for inmates with mental illness.
4. Community supervision strategies that support mental health treatment goals and aim to reduce the recidivism rates of probationers and parolees with mental illness.
5. Practices that prepare incarcerated individuals with mental illness for successful reintegration into the community.
6. Practices that improve outcomes for juveniles who are involved in the delinquency court system.

7. Education, training, and research initiatives that support the improvement of criminal justice responses to people with mental illness.

The task force carefully considered the economic impact of each recommendation on already stressed local and state budgets and on systems that would undoubtedly be affected by realignment activities. Although the immediate implementation of all recommendations may not be possible in the current fiscal environment, the task force was cognizant of the importance of creating aspirational recommendations that serve as a blueprint for improved responses to criminally involved persons with mental illness. The task force anticipated that improving responses for persons with mental illness in the criminal justice system will result in both short and long-term cost savings, greater efficiency, lower recidivism rates, and improved personal and public safety outcomes.

Next Steps

Taking all of the recommendations into consideration, Chief Justice Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye established the Mental Health Issues Implementation Task Force in 2012. The Implementation Task Force is charged with developing recommendations for policymakers, including the Judicial Council and its advisory committees, to improve systemwide responses to mentally ill offenders and to develop an action plan to implement the recommendations of the Task Force for Criminal Justice Collaboration on Mental Health Issues. This task force is identifying the recommendations under Judicial Council purview and developing a plan for judicial branch and inter-branch implementation activities to improve court, criminal justice, and mental health outcomes for adults and juvenile offenders with mental illness; ensure fair and expeditious administration of justice; and promote improved access to treatment for litigants in the justice system.

Resources

Below are links to the final report of the Task Force for Criminal Justice Collaboration on Mental Health Issues and the fact sheet of the Mental Health Issues Implementation Task Force.

- http://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/Mental_Health_Task_Force_Report_042011.pdf
- http://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/1.Fact.Sheet.MHIITF.January_2012.pdf

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