

Treatment of mental illness lowers arrest rates, saves money

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Research from North Carolina State University, the Research Triangle Institute (RTI) and the University of South Florida shows that outpatient treatment of mental illness significantly reduces arrest rates for people with mental health problems and saves taxpayers money.

"This study shows that providing [mental health care](#) is not only in the best interest of people with mental illness, but in the best interests of society," says Dr. Sarah Desmarais, an assistant professor of psychology at NC State and co-author of a paper describing the research.

The researchers wanted to determine the extent to which treating mental illness can keep people with [mental health problems](#) out of trouble with the law. It is well established that people with mental health problems, such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, make up a disproportionate percentage of defendants, [inmates](#) and others who come into contact with the [criminal justice system](#).

The researchers identified 4,056 people who had been hospitalized for mental illness in 2004 or 2005 and then tracked them from 2005 to 2012. The researchers were able to determine which individuals were receiving government-subsidized medication and which were receiving government-subsidized outpatient services, such as therapy. The researchers were also able to determine who was arrested during the seven-year study period.

"Our research shows that people receiving medication were significantly

less likely to be arrested," Desmarais says. "Outpatient services also resulted in a decreased likelihood of arrest."

The researchers also compared criminal justice costs with [mental health treatment](#) costs. Individuals who were arrested received less treatment and each cost the government approximately \$95,000 during the study period. Individuals who were not arrested received more treatment and each cost the government approximately \$68,000 during the study period.

"It costs about \$10 less per day to provide treatment and prevent crime. That's a good investment," Desmarais says.

More information: The paper, "Effects of Outpatient Treatment on Risk of Arrest of Adults With Serious Mental Illness and Associated Costs," was published online May 15 in the journal *Psychiatric Services*.

Provided by North Carolina State University

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