

Reducing the number of people with mental illnesses in US jails

May 6 2015, by Glenn O'neal

The American Psychiatric Foundation today joins other leading organizations in supporting the [Stepping Up Initiative](#), an unprecedented national collaboration designed to generate action in communities across the country for a common goal: to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in U.S. jails.

Stepping Up is being led by the National Association of Counties (NACo), the Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center and the American Psychiatric Foundation (APF), with support from the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA).

The number of people with mental illnesses in U.S. jails has reached a crisis level: 2 million individuals with serious mental illnesses like schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depression are admitted each year, many of whom also have drug and alcohol use problems. Allowing them to continually cycle through jails does nothing to improve public safety, stresses already strained budgets, and hurts people with mental illnesses and their loved ones.

The Stepping Up Initiative provides counties with clear direction for developing an action plan that makes effective use of budgets to facilitate access to treatment and promote appropriate alternatives to jail. County leaders embracing the initiative's Call to Action are asked to pass a resolution committing to key actions, including collecting data to determine the extent of the problem within each jail, developing a plan with a team of diverse stakeholders that draws on sound research, and

designing an approach to track progress. The initiative offers guidance and support to counties, including expert direction on collaborative planning and evidence-based practices.

People with mental illnesses, their family members, and advocates, will play an important role in the Stepping Up Initiative by participating in the work ahead and encouraging partners in government to embrace the Call to Action.

"The American Psychiatric Foundation is proud to be a key partner in launching Stepping Up," said APF Chairman Saul Levin, M.D., M.P.A. "People with mental illness need and deserve treatment, not incarceration. This front-line effort advances our mission to ensure that all people with [mental illness](#) have access to appropriate care."

Provided by American Psychiatric Association

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