



Behavioral Health Advisory Committee

Mission Statement: The mission of the Austin Travis County Behavioral Health Advisory Committee is to develop and sustain a planning partnership to support persons with behavioral health needs and to promote public safety.

Spring 2013 Planning Recommendations

Brief History: In 2012 Travis County mental health, criminal justice, and housing stakeholders met pursuant to a planning grant funded by the United States Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance. The report from Phase I planning can be viewed online at:

http://www.co.travis.tx.us/criminal_justice/Research_planning/pdfs/justice_mental_health_2012-10.pdf.

Phase II planning began in February 2013 and the group renamed itself the Behavioral Health Advisory Committee*. Further planning will occur in the fall of 2013 and spring of 2014. Recommendations are based upon the consensus of the participants utilizing previous research and data and are NOT in priority order.

- ❖ **Creation of a new assessment process for persons with mental illness and criminal justice involvement that includes criminogenic risk, behavioral health, and housing** - Utilization of the Criminogenic Risk and Behavioral Health Needs Framework developed by the Council on State Governments and the community housing tool currently being developed with ECHO and the Austin/Travis County Re-Entry Roundtable would enhance referral of individuals to appropriate treatment and housing. An evidenced based referral process would prevent anecdotal decision making and lead to better behavioral health and criminal justice outcomes.
- ❖ **Funding for Permanent Supportive Housing for persons with behavioral health needs and criminal justice involvement** - Grant funding and court programs have been hampered by the lack of housing stock that can be utilized for PSH. Typically grants will not fund capital costs. While there is ongoing progress on this issue, it is a critical need for the target population.
- ❖ **Interim Funding for additional psychiatric hospital beds for indigent persons** - The committee recognizes that more access to outpatient psychiatric care is critical to diminishing the need for psychiatric hospital beds. However, until the opening of a psychiatric emergency room at UMC Brackenridge and additional crisis stabilization services, additional psychiatric beds will allow increased diversion of persons with mental illness from the Travis County Jail and Correctional Center by the Crisis Intervention Team.
- ❖ **Funding of Assisted Outpatient Treatment through Travis County Probate Court** - Assisted Outpatient Treatment is an evidenced based model that engages persons with mental illness through Probate Court. Individuals participating in AOT are more likely to maintain their mental health in the community thereby decreasing the need for hospitalization, emergency services, and incarceration.

- ❖ **Creation of residential treatment beds for persons with behavioral health needs and criminal justice involvement** - The current supply of residential beds is extremely limited and prevents access to treatment when individuals are treatment ready. Typically, these defendants must wait in jail for a treatment bed due to their inability to maintain stability and sobriety in the community. Individuals with significant mental health and substance use disorders are highly recidivistic and need robust and lengthy treatment services, including pharmacological intervention and supported housing.
- ❖ **Creation and funding of a sobriety and detox facility** - Travis County has long envisioned establishing a sobriety center for those charged with public intoxication offenses as an alternative to arrest and booking in the jail. The sobriety center would be a place for police to drop off those arrested for public intoxication to sober up and would offer ancillary services, such as detoxification and treatment referral. Although most persons that it would serve would not have a mental health disorder or even a substance use disorder, it is being recommended as a diversion tool for this initiative's target population because public intoxication has historically been a frequently charged offense.
- ❖ **Create a process by which the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) and Mobile Crisis Outreach Team (MCOT) can work together to divert persons with mental illness from being booked into jail where appropriate** - By adding MCOT capacity at key community intercept points, such as central booking at the county jail, we can take advantage of opportunities to divert individuals from costly incarceration and provide specialty behavioral health treatment. MCOT services include site-based psychiatric screening and psychiatric crisis assessment, access to a prescriber as needed, diversion to appropriate community-based care and resources and short-term follow-up to ensure the individual's immediate crisis is stabilized and the individual is linked with ongoing care and resources.
- ❖ **The Committee recommends and supports a review by law enforcement of their policies and additional training on evidence based practices utilizing tactics and techniques that the have been proven effective** - While CIT training is imperative for patrol officers that deal with emotionally disturbed persons, additional training can help keep officers and individuals safe during a psychiatric crisis. Policies may need to be rewritten to reflect current evidence-based practices.

*The Behavioral Health Advisory Committee includes representatives from the following governmental agencies, community non-profits and providers:

Austin Municipal Court	Recovery Law Institute
Austin Police Department, Planning & CIT	Seton Family of Hospitals
Austin/Travis County EMS	Texas Department of State Health Services
Austin/Travis County Integral Care (ATCIC)	Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid
Austin/Travis County Re-Entry Roundtable	Travis County Adult Probation
Beyond Today	Travis County Attorney's Office
Caritas of Austin	Travis County Counseling & Education Services
Central Health	Travis County Criminal Courts
City of Austin Health & Human Services	Travis County District Attorney's Office
Corporation for Supporting Housing, Texas	Travis County Health & Human Services
Disability Rights of Texas	Travis County Justice & Public Safety Department
Downtown Austin Alliance	Travis County Mental Health Public Defender
Downtown Austin Community Court	Travis County Pretrial Services Department
Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO)	Travis County Sheriff's Office, CIT & Counseling
Lone Star Circle of Care	Travis County Veterans Court
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)	Veterans Administration