

# How Counties Are Responding to Behavioral Health Needs and Improving Public Safety

## What is Stepping Up?

Stepping Up counties are reducing overincarceration of people with mental illnesses and substance use disorders. This national initiative gives county leaders the resources and tools they need to meet this challenge in their community by

- Increasing collaboration among behavioral health, crisis, criminal justice, homelessness, and other systems to develop shared solutions;
- Using data to inform effective policy decisions; and
- Implementing high-impact strategies, with a particular focus on diversion and crisis response.

## Why is it important?

Committing to the principles of Stepping Up can ultimately lead to

- Fewer people with behavioral health needs entering the justice system when they can be safely served in the community;
- Improved access to treatment and other support services;
- Greater public safety;
- Better health outcomes; and

- A solid foundation for advancing racial equity and incorporating the voices of people with lived experience in the criminal justice and behavioral health systems.

## How far does Stepping Up reach?

There are 559 counties across 43 states in the network—48 percent of the U.S. population resides in a Stepping Up county. Forty-one Innovator counties have accurate, accessible baseline data on the prevalence of serious mental illness (SMI) in their justice systems and are implementing high-impact interventions to address behavioral health needs in the justice and crisis systems.

## What have Stepping Up sites accomplished?

Since the initiative launched in 2015, Stepping Up counties across the country have made significant strides. Here are a few examples of the many successes we've seen:

Five states have launched statewide Stepping Up initiatives: **Alabama, California, Kansas, Pennsylvania, and Ohio.**

***“In Franklin County, we have launched ‘Stepping Toward Justice’ to address racial equality and build equitable access to diversion and other community supports and programs. We followed the Stepping Up framework to form our planning team, use the four key measures for our data collection process, and apply the Stepping Up methodology for prioritizing our next steps.”***

Ruchelle Pride, Director, Office of Justice Policy & Programs, Franklin County, Ohio

**Bernalillo County, New Mexico; Fulton County, Georgia; and Polk County, Iowa,** are using data and community partnerships to identify and serve people who frequently utilize multiple systems and connect them to treatment and services.

**Fairfax County, Virginia,** expanded crisis response center services in 2016, resulting in over 3,000 diversions from potential arrest.

**Dauphin County, Pennsylvania,** reduced its average daily jail population with SMI from 16 percent to 13 percent in 2021.

**Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania,** reduced the number of people with SMI in the county jail from 1,620 in the first quarter of 2015 to 583 in the fourth quarter of 2021.

## What are Stepping Up counties focusing on now?

The initiative's latest call to action, Set, Measure, Achieve, encourages counties to establish and reach measurable goals that demonstrate reduced prevalence of behavioral health needs in jails, and use this data to measure the impact of their county's overall efforts to address behavioral health needs in the justice system. The Stepping Up partners are supporting 35 sites in these efforts—10 of which have already identified and are working toward concrete targets.

## What can my county get out of the Stepping Up initiative?

The Stepping Up initiative offers educational resources such as guides, briefs, web events, and tools; peer-to-peer learning opportunities through Innovator county calls and connections with other counties; and one-on-one technical assistance from the Stepping Up partners.

### How can I advance my county's Stepping Up work?

1.

Become a Stepping Up Innovator county with access to accurate data on SMI in your county justice system:  
[StepUpTogether.org/Take-Action/Become-a-Stepping-Up-Innovator-County/](https://StepUpTogether.org/Take-Action/Become-a-Stepping-Up-Innovator-County/).

2.

Join Set, Measure, Achieve to set targets on SMI measures and track your progress over time:  
[StepUpTogether.org/Take-Action/Sign-on-to-a-Call-to-Action/](https://StepUpTogether.org/Take-Action/Sign-on-to-a-Call-to-Action/).

3.

Learn more about high-impact strategies addressing behavioral health needs in the justice and crisis systems through the Stepping Up Strategy Lab and submit your county's examples:  
[StepUpTogether.org/Explore/Discover-Local-Strategies/](https://StepUpTogether.org/Explore/Discover-Local-Strategies/).

4.

Reach out to [info@stepuptogether.org](mailto:info@stepuptogether.org)  
if you have any questions.

Stepping Up is a national initiative reducing the overincarceration of people with mental illnesses and is a partnership between The Council of State Governments Justice Center, the National Association of Counties, and the American Psychiatric Association Foundation.

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