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Stepping Up Initiative Expands Push For Counties to Collect Data on Number of People in Jails Who Have Mental Illnesses

Designates Seven Innovator Counties For Their Expertise In Data Collection

WASHINGTON, DC—May 1, 2018—The *Stepping Up* initiative launched a national effort today to help counties collect accurate, accessible data on the number of people entering their jails who have mental illnesses. As part of the effort, seven rural and urban “Innovator Counties” have been selected as models for their expertise in accurately identifying these individuals and consistently collecting data on them.

The *Stepping Up* initiative was launched in May 2015 by The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center, the National Association of Counties (NACo), and the American Psychiatric Association Foundation (APA Foundation) to mobilize local, state, and national leaders to achieve a measurable reduction in the number of people in jails who have mental illnesses.

Since that time, more than 430 counties in 43 states, representing 40 percent of the U.S. population, have committed to building local leadership teams, identifying the number of people with mental illnesses entering their jail system, ensuring that those people are connected with services, and developing a comprehensive plan for systems-level change. To continue the push toward the goal of reducing the prevalence of people in jails who have mental illnesses, *Stepping Up* is expanding its efforts to provide counties with the tools they need to overcome difficulties in data collection, which often include limited staff capacity, lack of validated tools, and insufficient data-sharing mechanisms.

“Collecting accurate data on the number of people with mental illnesses can be difficult, but it is critical to have a complete picture of what’s happening in our jails,” said Tracy Plouck, director of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and vice-chair of the CSG Justice Center’s Board of Directors. “By committing to collecting and reviewing baseline data, *Stepping Up* counties will be able to bring to scale their programs and solutions, identify and fill gaps in treatment and services, and track their progress towards the goal of having fewer people with mental illnesses in jail.”

In order to help overcome these challenges, the *Stepping Up* partners have identified a three-step approach to collecting accurate data that includes:

- establishing a shared definition of serious mental illness;
- ensuring everyone booked into the jail is screened for mental illnesses using a validated tool, and referring those who screen positive for a clinical assessment by a licensed mental health professional; and
- regularly reporting on this population.

Stepping Up's seven Innovator Counties—Calaveras County, CA; Miami-Dade County, FL; Champaign County, IL; Douglas County, KS; Johnson County, KS; Franklin County, OH; and Pacific County, WA—have each implemented this approach and will be sharing their experiences identifying and gathering data on the people entering their jails who have mental illnesses. Other counties that are already using or committed to using this approach are encouraged to become an Innovator County.

“These Innovator Counties — with populations ranging from 22,000 to 2.6 million — demonstrate that collecting accurate information on people with mental illnesses in jail is both critical and possible,” said NACo President Roy Charles Brooks. “Stepping Up has made much progress in its first three years. Helping counties build on our accurate data collection and other efforts will move the needle even further.”

Stepping Up counties will receive technical assistance and resources to improve their mental health screening and assessment processes and strengthen their data collection and tracking so that they are equipped to deploy strategies that create a system-wide impact.

“Understanding the full scope of this problem is essential to help communities develop a comprehensive plan to confront this crisis,” said Dr. Altha Stewart, president-elect of the APA. “*Stepping Up* is committed to providing counties with the tools that they need to make a real reduction in the number of people with mental illnesses who are currently involved in the criminal justice system. We need to ensure that people with mental illness are getting treatment.”

To learn more about *Stepping Up*, access resources, and see if you are following the three-step approach, visit stepuptogether.org.

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ABOUT THE STEPPING UP INITIATIVE

Stepping Up is a national initiative to reduce the number of people in jail who have mental illnesses. The initiative—a collaboration between The Council of State Governments Justice Center, the National Association of Counties and the American Psychiatric Association Foundation—asks communities to come together to develop an action plan that can be used to achieve measurable impact in local criminal justice systems of all sizes across the country. For more information visit <https://stepuptogether.org>.