

Criminal Justice Coordinating Council Members: Tips for Supporting the Local Behavioral Health Service Continuum

PUBLIC DEFENDERS

Public defenders often have first-hand knowledge of the challenges faced by people with behavioral health problems who come in contact with the criminal justice system. Joining this with a deep understanding of the rights of individuals going through the justice system, the Public Defender's perspective can help shape meaningful improvements in the local behavioral health service continuum.

Explore Avenues for Diversion

- *Support* use of an evidence-based, validated risk assessment to prevent clients who are at low or moderate risk of noncompliance from being incarcerated unnecessarily.
- *Partner with behavioral health professionals* in the legal defense to help address underlying behavioral health issues that contribute to clients' contact with the justice system, including:
 - Clinicians to evaluate mental health and substance use disorders
 - Social workers to provide support with housing, treatment, and/or employment
- Develop agreements for the assessment of clients for mental illness or co-occurring disorders during the pretrial phase of their cases (to safely guide the use of that information while ensuring clients receive the services they need).
- *Advocate for diversion* to mental health or substance use treatment, where appropriate.

Partner with Stakeholders

- *Coordinate* with criminal justice and behavioral health professionals and family/consumer advocates to enhance the effectiveness of diversion programs.
- *Partner* with behavioral health providers on funding opportunities to integrate case management and behavioral health services into public defense teams.
- *Lend expertise* to community initiatives on improving criminal justice outcomes.
- *Participate* in the local Criminal Justice Coordinating Council and/or subcommittee focused on behavioral health issues to develop innovative solutions to community needs, including:
 - Identifying opportunities for diversion from the criminal justice system to treatment where appropriate
 - Identifying gaps and opportunities in the local behavioral health service continuum

Advocate for Systems Change

- Build consensus around identifying gaps in behavioral health services by meeting with community leaders or holding community listening sessions.
- Leverage knowledge of the legal system and gaps in the behavioral health services continuum to communicate areas of need to stakeholders.
- Use traditional and new media (newspapers, televised interviews, and social media) to communicate the need and support for behavioral health services and interventions.
- Educate leaders and the community on potential or existing civil rights issues related to the incarceration of people with mental illness or co-occurring disorders.