

Housing and the Sequential Intercept Model:
A How-to Guide for Planning for the
Housing Needs of Individuals with
Justice Involvement and Mental Illness

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Purpose of the Handbook

What is the purpose of this Handbook?

“The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has identified the over-representation of persons with mental illnesses in the criminal justice system as a phenomenon with profound public safety and public health implications. For persons with mental illnesses, the pathways into and out of custody are complex, yet promising practices that may reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in jails and prisons exist, both within the Commonwealth and throughout the country...

Recommendations are designed to promote a statewide effort to build upon these successful strategies and effect a measurable reduction in the number of justice-involved persons with mental illnesses, while enhancing public safety and the well-being of our communities.” - From *Developing a Statewide, Strategic Plan to Guide Pennsylvania’s Response to People with Mental Illnesses Involved with the Criminal Justice System*, a report developed by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare in collaboration with the Council of State Governments Justice Center.

The Pennsylvania Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS) recognizes that stable housing is a critical element to any successful strategy designed to reduce justice involvement among individuals with mental illness. In recognition of this fact, OMHSAS commissioned this Handbook to assist communities in engaging in a planning process to increase housing opportunities and decrease justice involvement and recidivism among individuals with mental illness.

The Handbook provides direction to mental health, criminal justice, housing and other agencies interested in working together to address housing needs. Specifically, the Handbook:

- explains why housing is a critical element;
- describes the obstacles of individuals with justice involvement and mental illness in locating housing;
- introduces a number of successful housing strategies and models for individuals with justice involvement and mental illness; and
- provides a step by step guide to successfully incorporating housing players and resources into a planning process.

Over the last few years OMHSAS has worked to develop strong collaborative relationships with criminal justice stakeholders. These stakeholders include the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC), the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole (PBPP), the Administrative Office of the Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) and

the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD), as well as the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP) and others representing law enforcement, the courts, advocates and victim services.

Specifically, OMHSAS and PCCD have collaborated to support the development of Criminal Justice Advisory Boards (CJAB) in all counties and to promote the participation of the county mental health authorities as active members of the CJABs. The two agencies have also established a Memorandum of Understanding and joint funding to create a Mental Health and Justice Center of Excellence. They have also expanded the mental health/justice grant program, which has funded CJAB-identified priority initiatives such as the establishment of Mental Health Specialty Courts.

In embarking on these joint ventures it became increasingly clear to OMHSAS that there needed to be a third party to the mental health/criminal justice partnership -- housing. OMHSAS believes that decent, safe, affordable housing and supports are essential to both recovery and successful community tenure for individuals who have mental illness, especially for those involved with or at risk of involvement with the justice system. Furthermore, research has shown that stable housing significantly impacts the rate of re-arrest for individuals returning to their communities from incarceration, as well as provides a cost effective alternative to institutionalization, homelessness and incarceration.

Who is the target population?

This document is designed to provide assistance for working with and planning for the housing needs of individuals with justice involvement and mental illness and often co-occurring substance use disorder. This includes individuals at any stage of the justice system, from arrest to release from incarceration to probation and all points in between. This document will use the term “individuals with justice involvement and mental illness” in reference to this target population.

Additionally, because this document is grounded in the principles of recovery, individuals should be eligible for housing related assistance whether or not they are actively involved in receiving services related to their mental illness. (See Appendix A for the principles of recovery.)

Finally, although there are some key differences in barriers to re-entry planning for individuals in state prison versus those incarcerated in county jails, both groups face significant challenges including barriers to housing upon their return to the community. This Handbook will provide the housing information needed to assist individuals returning from either county jails or state prisons.

Who is the target audience for the Handbook?

This Handbook is designed for use by the following groups and individuals:

- County mental health and behavioral health offices

- Other county planners and administrators
- Criminal Justice Advisory Boards (CJABs)
- Probation and parole offices
- Peer specialists
- Local Housing Option Teams (LHOTs) and other housing coalitions
- Housing developers/providers including public housing authorities and community action agencies
- Advocates
- Forensic specialists and liaisons
- Mental health/criminal justice alternatives such as Mental Health Courts and diversion alternative programs

What are the uses for the Handbook?

This Handbook can serve multiple uses including the following:

- Bring together a forum to successfully address the issue of diverse needs of individuals with justice involvement and mental illness, including ensuring that individuals in the housing, mental health and criminal justice systems understand each other's language and issues
- Serve as a guide for a planning process to identify community needs and goals for addressing those needs
- Secure the information needed to advocate for others to recognize and address the housing needs of the target population
- Assist in developing specific strategies and activities for advancing local goals
- Help address OMHSAS planning requirements for housing and for the forensic population
- Encourage mental health and criminal justice representatives to join local housing coalitions
- Position your community to take advantage of federal, state, and local resource opportunities
- Convince local officials to redirect resources to housing for individuals with justice involvement and mental illness

How is the Handbook organized?

The Handbook is organized around nine steps in a planning process for creating housing opportunities for people with mental illness and justice involvement. It begins with an explanation of why the availability of housing for this population is important in Step 1 and concludes with Step 9, which provides a framework for creating an action plan in your community to work on expanding housing options.

Each step provides background information and tangible activities to achieve that step in the planning process. For example, Step 2 assists you in defining the problem and setting the goals for your community. In Step 3, you will learn about who to include in your planning process. Step 4 provides information about data needs and how to go about data

collection, while Steps 5 and 6 provide guidance for identifying housing and service needs and resources. Step 7 provides specific examples in Pennsylvania of housing programs for people with mental illness with justice involvement and Step 8 provides information on developing alternative housing strategies.