



For Immediate Release
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TOGETHER WE CAN: KEEPING PEOPLE WITH UNMET MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES OUT OF JAILS

Sacramento—We see it in the news far too often: a person in a mental health crisis coming into contact with law enforcement, taken to jail instead of receiving the mental health care he or she needs. The results are heartbreaking and often tragic; lives are irrevocably changed and jails are overcrowded with people who don't necessarily belong there in the first place.

California's Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission (MHSOAC) launched an eighteen month review of this issue and has just released the report, *Together We Can: Reducing Criminal Justice Involvement for People with Mental Illness*. While not a comprehensive study of mental illness, it's an actionable roadmap for change calling for California to make an immediate and strong commitment to address this complex issue.

"One of the greatest policy failures of our time was dismantling our state mental health care institutions without having adequate community-based treatment in its place," said MHSOAC Commissioner and Santa Barbara County Sheriff Bill Brown. "Our jails shouldn't be used in place of treatment. We believe we should, and can, do better."

The Commission's report contains six recommendations, with a focus on collaboration in creating change:

- California's mental health agencies, in partnership with law enforcement and others, should have a comprehensive **prevention-focused plan** to reduce the incarceration of mental health consumers in their communities.
- The Board of State and Community Corrections should facilitate **a collaborative effort** with counties to identify, develop and deploy services and strategies, including **universal screening** for mental health needs at booking and more training for custody staff.
- California must **maximize diversion** from the criminal justice system, including expanding options for **restoring competency** to those incompetent to stand trial.
- The Council on Criminal Justice and Behavioral Health should fortify its efforts to support collaboration among state agencies toward **prevention and diversion efforts**.

- California’s Health and Human Services Agency should reduce any barriers to **make data available** that would help identify service gaps.
- California, in partnership with counties, should expand **technical assistance** to increase cultural competence, improve **professional training**, increase the use of data and **evaluation** and advance the dissemination of **best practices**.

“This report represents hope, collaboration and the leveraging of opportunities to help the many Californians who are in the system inappropriately,” said MHSOAC Chair Tina Wooton. “Through strategy and coordination, we have an enormous opportunity to bring public awareness, public support and reduce the stigma of mental illness to make real transformational change.”

To view the full report: www.mhsoac.ca.gov/criminal-justice

To view a video: www.mhsoac.ca.gov