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[BJS Report Highlights Need to Improve Responses to People with Mental Illnesses in the Criminal Justice System](#)

A report recently released by the [Bureau of Justice Statistics \(BJS\)](#) - *Mental Health Problems of Prison and Jail Inmates* - has concluded that more than half of all prison and jail inmates have "mental health problems." The issues the report raises have long been pressing concerns for state and local government officials, mental health professionals and consumers, and others committed to improving the response to people with mental illnesses involved in the criminal justice system. [Click here](#) to access the report.

The findings from the report were derived from inmates' self-reported symptoms that can be associated with mental disorders, rather than from an official diagnosis of a mental illness. Because these measures differ from those used by BJS in their previous studies (1999 and 2000) of people with mental illnesses in prisons and jails, it is difficult to compare the results of the different reports.

The results from all of BJS's reports, however, confirm what front-line professionals in law enforcement, the courts, and prisons and jails have said for years: that the number of people with mental illnesses in the criminal justice system is a growing problem that requires coordinated response. CSG has been working with its Consensus Project partners and others in the field to notify the media and policymakers about the tremendous impact of this problem on the lives of people with mental illnesses, state and local budgets, and public safety. To view CSG's press release on the report, [click here](#).

Many specialized strategies to improve coordination among criminal justice and mental health professionals are outlined in the 2002 [Criminal Justice/Mental Health Consensus Project Report](#). A growing number of communities across the country are now using the kinds of collaborative approaches and innovative policies the report recommends, including initiatives that help reduce injuries and arrests in law enforcement encounters, enable courts to ensure accountability while meeting the needs of individuals with mental illnesses, and help corrections professionals reduce the numbers of individuals with mental illnesses who cycle through prisons and jails.

To access previous BJS studies on criminal justice/mental health issues

- [Mental Health Treatment in State Prisons, 2000](#) and [Mental Health and Treatment of Inmates and Probationers, 1999](#) - [click here](#).

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CSG Releases National Survey of Mental Health Courts

The Council of State Governments (CSG) recently released its most comprehensive national Mental Health Court Survey. To participate in this survey [click here](#).

The survey project, supported by the [Bureau of Justice Assistance \(BJA\)](#), U.S. Department of Justice, is a federal effort to inventory mental health court programs and provide detailed information about court operations for the benefit of practitioners and policy makers across the country. It is coordinated by CSG in its role as technical assistance provider for the [BJA Mental Health Courts Program \(MHCP\)](#).

Information collected through this survey will be accessible through the [Criminal Justice/Mental Health Information Network \(InfoNet\)](#), an online clearinghouse of program information, research, media, legislation, and more. The InfoNet, coordinated by CSG in collaboration with the [National GAINS/TAPA Center](#) and other organizations, offers practical resources to help program coordinators, policymakers, the media, and others better understand the issue and available strategies for improving responses to people with mental illnesses involved in the criminal justice system.

This is the third mental health court survey coordinated by CSG and builds on previous surveys. In 2003, CSG, the National GAINS/TAPA Center, and [NAMI](#) created the first national [Survey of Mental Health Courts](#). In 2005, CSG conducted the second Mental Health Court Survey in conjunction with its national [Mental Health Courts and Beyond](#) conference. For further background on CSG's prior efforts to survey mental health courts [click here](#).

If you have any questions regarding the Mental Health Court Survey contact [Seth Prins](#) at 646-383-5729.

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Senior Policy Analyst Denise Tomasini Announces Departure from CSG

Denise Tomasini, Senior Policy Analyst for the Council of State Governments (CSG) Criminal Justice/Mental Health Consensus Project, has recently announced her departure from CSG after over three years of service.

Denise coordinated CSG's technical assistance work for the [Bureau of Justice Assistance Mental Health Courts Program \(MHCP\)](#). In this role Denise helped identify and plan the mental health court [learning sites](#) project, develop several [mental health court publications](#), and organize [national meetings of mental health courts](#). She also worked with the [National GAINS/TAPA Center](#) to oversee the [Judges' Criminal Justice and Mental Health Leadership Initiative](#).

Moving forward, Research Assistant [Lauren Almquist](#), 646-383-5743, will serve as the primary contact for CSG's work on mental health courts.

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Corrections Administrators Address Barriers to Services for People Returning From Prison and Jail

The [Association of State Correctional Administrators \(ASCA\)](#) recently sent letters to the [Medicaid Commission](#) and the [Social Security Administration](#) addressing legal and logistical barriers that

prisoners face in obtaining identification and public benefits upon their return from prison or jail. These barriers can prevent individuals from accessing needed services, including mental health services, during the critical period immediately following their release. The letters are a part of ASCA's efforts to ensure that people who are released from correctional facilities become productive members of the community.

For more information and to view the letters [click here](#).

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Announcements

[Researchers Examining CIT Program Model, Request Expert Input](#)

Researchers from the Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis are administering a survey to identify which aspects of Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) model are held as critical to program success. Intended to better define the components of the CIT model, the research project is based on survey submissions from CIT coordinators and experts; [click here](#) to access the survey.

[Save the Date - Crisis Intervention Team \(CIT\) National Conference, September 25-27, Orlando, FL](#)

This national conference is designed to highlight effective programs and initiatives, such as CITs, to improve responses to individuals with mental illnesses or co-occurring substance use disorders involved in the criminal justice system. Select panels also focus on mental health courts and corrections-based responses to this population.

[Save the Date - International Community Corrections Association \(ICCA\) 14th Annual International Research Conference, October 8-11, Norfolk, VA](#)

The ICCA will hold its annual conference to highlight research around promising practices for reducing recidivism currently in use by programs across the country. An array of workshops at the conference will also focus on implementing these practices.

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Criminal Justice and Mental Health in the News

Articles from the Consensus Project homepage - from newspapers around the country - covering issues at the intersection of mental health and criminal justice are posted below. To access a complete list of media coverage, visit the [media coverage page](#).

[NPR](#) - [Mental Health Problems Common in Prisons](#)
9/19/06 - "Corrections officials have complained for years that America's prisons and jails are becoming the country's new asylums for the mentally ill. A recent Justice Department study supports that claim."

[The Associated Press](#) - [Prisons Lacking Mental Health Treatment](#)
9/6/06 - "More than half of America's prison and jail inmates have symptoms of a mental health problem, the Justice Department estimated Wednesday. But fewer than one-third of those with problems are getting treatment behind bars."

[Journal News \(OH\)](#) - [Justice pushes for more focus on mentally ill](#)
8/30/06 - "On Wednesday, [Justice Evelyn Stratton] challenged the courts and the business community to...[develop] a collaborative project to generate more housing and treatment options for the mentally ill."

[Midland Reporter Telegram \(TX\)](#) - [Mental health deputies great addition, authorities say](#)
8/21/06 - "The mental health deputies have done and performed exactly as we've anticipated. Their primary function is to divert individuals from jail and in that regard, they have been highly successful."

[The New Standard](#) - Campaigners Fight to Keep Mentally Ill out of Solitary Confinement
8/18/06 - "On any given day, hundreds of New York State's mentally ill inmates are enclosed in solitary confinement, often called 'special housing units' (SHUs)..."

[The Norman Transcript](#) (OK) - Mental Health Court offers treatment as alternative to jail
8/13/06 - "When people with mental illnesses are arrested for trespassing, shoplifting and other nonviolent offenses in Cleveland County, they no longer will be automatically sentenced to prison or probation, where their illness likely would go untreated."

[TC Palm](#) (FL) - Demand on the rise for use of St. Lucie County mental health court
8/6/06 - "When mental health court began in early June, there were about a half-dozen cases on the docket. At a recent session, the number had increased to 35, surprising some of its organizers and showing how much of a need there is in the community, they say."

[The Caledonia Record](#) (VT) - Justice, Police, Mental Health Systems Wrestle With Troubled Offenders
8/5/06 - "Defendants like Barrett and Turcotte create a difficult situation for law enforcement authorities and mental health workers."

[Grand Rapids Press](#) (MI) - Ionia jail program saves up to \$100,000 monthly
7/27/06 - "Putting someone who has a history of mental illness behind bars only exacerbates the situation, when what they really need is professional help."

[Pensacola News Journal](#) (FL) - For some, time behind bars means Escambia jail or Chattahoochee
7/21/06 - "Twelve inmates at Escambia County Jail are killing time there, waiting to go to the Florida State Hospital in Chattahoochee to be treated for mental illness."

[The News & Observer](#) (NC) - Comment: Growth and the courthouse
7/20/06 - "The committee calls for investment in a comprehensive, community-based mental health system to deal with the large number of inmates with serious substance abuse and mental illness problems."

[Business Daily](#) (IA) - Build jail, but also treat mental illness
7/16/06 - "But what the new jail won't fix is the number of people with significant mental health problems who get in trouble with the law -- mainly because they are not receiving the medical treatments they need."

[The New York Times](#) (NY) - Decriminalizing Mental Illness
7/16/06 - "Now mentally ill people who commit crimes or create public disturbances often go straight to jail, where they receive little treatment and where their symptoms usually get worse."

[Miami Herald](#) (FL) - We're in crisis mode
7/9/06 - "Last year, the Miami-Dade County grand jury, in effect, issued an indictment on the way we treat people in our community with mental illnesses."

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