

Mental health initiative to provide intervention

Written by Michael R. Bloomberg
Tuesday, 01 January 2013 21:01



DEPUTY Mayor for Health and Human Services Linda I. Gibbs, Chief Policy Advisor John Feinblatt, Department of Correction Commissioner Dora B. Schriro, Health Commissioner Thomas A. Farley and I announced a new mental health initiative that will build on the city's record of reducing crime by providing increased support for New Yorkers with mental illness who become involved with the city's criminal courts.

Under the new plan, Court-based Intervention and Resource Teams in each borough will collect and quickly relay information on defendants' mental health care needs, risk of flight and risk of re-offense to the court-based teams to recommend appropriate judicial responses for each defendant's specific risks and mental health needs.

The initiative will demonstrate how jurisdictions can more appropriately respond to the needs of defendants with mental health issues, lower crime further and help reduce the number of people who are incarcerated.

If more New Yorkers who need mental health care and community support can be helped to get their lives on track when they've run afoul of the law, we will all be better off.

No one needs to be reminded any more of just how important it is to get this group of people the care they need.

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The Court-based Intervention and Resource Teams will give judges recommendations — based on verified data — for better managing mentally ill people who become involved with the court system.

Defendants with a significant mental health issue who do not pose a substantial risk of re-arrest or failure to appear will be recommended for release to community-based supervision and services while their cases are pending in court.

These services will be provided by experienced groups who will report to the court on their clients' progress.

A second defendant group, those who do not pose a substantial risk of being re-arrested but pose a high risk of not appearing in court, will be eligible for alternatives to incarceration where they can get needed services and care.

(Offenders who pose a high risk of flight and re-arrest will not be eligible for diversion.)

City data shows that, on average, 36 percent of inmates in New York City (including 58 percent of women inmates and 42 percent of inmates ages 16 to 18) have some level of mental illness, compared to less than one out of every four in 2005.

An even greater percentage of young adults in Department of Correction custody — 42 percent — have been diagnosed with a mental illness.

The average length of stay in jail for inmates with mental illness is 112 days, compared to 60 days for those without mental illness.

For young men, ages 16-24, the difference is more pronounced (156 days compared to 67

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days).

The mentally ill are less likely to be able to post bail and stay in jail twice as long as inmates who don't have mental health issues, even if they've committed similar crimes and have similar bail amounts because they tend to have fewer financial resources and/or family and friends willing to post their bail.

This disparity in length of stay holds true even when controlling for charges, risk of re-arrest, and actual re-arrest rates.

Differences in length of stay also persist regardless of gender or the borough in which the crime was committed.

Inmates with serious mental health issues cost approximately three times as much to incarcerate than those without mental illness because of the resources dedicated to appropriate supervision, medical and mental health care.

This announcement follows progress made by the Mayor's Steering Committee of the Citywide Justice and Mental Health Initiative which first met September 2011.

Led by Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services Linda Gibbs and Chief Policy Advisor John Feinblatt, the committee focused on the question of why, even as crime has decreased and the jail population has declined, the percentage of incarcerated mentally ill has risen.

Committee members include Department of Correction Commissioner Dora Schriro, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Commissioner Tom Farley, Department of Probation Commissioner Vincent Schiraldi, Health and Hospitals Corp. President Alan Aviles, Department of Homeless Services Commissioner Seth Diamond, and representatives from legal services, community-based organizations, district attorneys' offices and the judiciary.

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The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center, a nationally recognized research and policy organization, advised and provided support to the Steering Committee.

Their analyses, stakeholder interviews, and report with recommendations based on research and emerging national best practices was supported by the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance and the Jacob and Valeria Langeloth Foundation to help position New York as a potential model for other sites.