

# MENTAL HEALTH AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

CASE STUDY: Bexar County, Texas



METROPOLITAN  
SAN ANTONIO  
POPULATION:  
**1,855,866**<sup>1</sup>

JAIL BED  
CAPACITY:  
**4,563**<sup>2</sup>

AVERAGE  
DAILY JAIL  
POPULATION:  
**3,500**<sup>3</sup>

## BACKGROUND

In 2000, Bexar County was facing a severe jail overcrowding problem. As a result, the state was considering taking over operations of the jail, and the federal government was threatening to issue sanctions until appropriate conditions were met. County commissioners were facing the possibility of having to build 1,000 new jail beds. Instead, they supported what would become the Bexar County Jail Diversion Program. Today, the jail is about 1,000 people below capacity.

In April 2002, Bexar County developed a jail diversion planning and advisory committee (PAC) – led by a judge and a diverse group of stakeholders – to plan for the program’s components. The group met monthly for a year to recommend improvements to the system based on targeted outcome measures. The result is a full-spectrum jail diversion program for residents in Bexar County. This group continues to meet regularly to discuss progress and next steps for the program.

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IN BEXAR COUNTY,  
**IT COSTS \$2,295** PER JAIL  
BOOKING.  
**IT COSTS \$350** PER DIVERSION.

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## JAIL DIVERSION PROGRAM

The Bexar County Jail Diversion program identifies 46 separate intervention points where jail diversion can occur. They divide these intervention points into three phases: before, during and after incarceration.

## PHASES OF JAIL DIVERSION

1. The first phase focuses on diverting people before they are arrested and/or booked into the county jail, typically by a Crisis Intervention Team or Deputy Mobile Outreach Team.
2. The second phase provides treatment alternatives for the person who is in jail by focusing on identification, screening and recommendation for alternative dispositions such as mental health bond or release to a treatment facility.
3. The final phase provides individuals with appropriate services upon release with the goal of ensuring continued mental health and support services and reintegration into the community.

The Bexar County Jail Diversion Program employs nearly 150 staff, including physicians, nurses, licensed mental health professionals, benefit specialists, case workers, and vocational and housing specialists. Funding for the program is provided through federal, state and local support; Medicaid; Medicare; the University Health System; and CareLink, Bexar County’s health initiative. Through Bexar County’s planning and advisory committee, training for police officers in Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT) is provided through in-kind services and staff support from law enforcement, behavioral health and local hospitals, saving around \$800 per officer in training costs.

In addition, by screening people for mental illness and Medicaid eligibility, Bexar County was able to secure state funds that allowed them to earn Medicaid Administrative Claims (MAC), which can cover anywhere from 25 to 30 percent of the cost of diverting an individual from jail. County administrators also encouraged state hospitals and other institutional practitioners to seek out payment eligibility with all available payers in the area, including Medicaid, private insurance, Medicaid managed care payers and the Veterans Administration. They also received grants from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and private foundations.

## CRISIS CARE CENTER AND RESTORATION CENTER TREATMENT OPTIONS INCLUDE:

- 24-hour screening and assessment
- 48-hour inpatient psychiatric unit
- Outpatient services for psychiatric and primary care
- Residential Detoxification
- Sobering
- Injured Prisoner Program
- Outpatient Substance Abuse Treatment Program
- Intensive Substance Abuse Outpatient Counseling Services
- In-House Recovery Program
- Housing for people with mental illnesses
- Job training

## THE CRISIS CARE CENTER AND RESTORATION CENTER

Two important components of the Jail Diversion Program are the Crisis Care Center and the Restoration Center. The Restoration Center was started in 2007 by the Center for Behavioral Health Services, Bexar County's behavioral health authority, to address silos dividing substance abuse treatment and mental health services by providing integrated substance abuse services. In combination with The Crisis Care Center, a 24-hour psychiatric emergency unit developed in 2005, the Restoration Center serves about 2,200 people per month. The two centers work together to provide law enforcement with quick access to treatment for individuals with substance abuse disorders. They also offer substance abuse services for people who are homeless.

Individuals can be referred to The Restoration Center by law enforcement, courts, the Mobile Crisis Outreach Team, the sobering unit, the Crisis Care Center, individuals, families and behavioral health professionals. Individuals can also simply walk in to receive services, as is the case for many of its homeless clients. As part of the diversion continuum, the Restoration Center allows officers to drop off an individual experiencing a mental health crisis and be back on the street within 15 minutes to take more calls for service. The Restoration Center is open 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year.

In 2010, Haven for Hope opened a \$100 million, 962-bed homeless facility. Located just across the street from the Restoration Center,

Haven for Hope is a recovery-oriented system of care that is part of the continuum of services for people in need of 24-hour psychiatric crisis assessment, sobering services, medical monitoring services, employment services and housing. As many of the individuals who come to the Restoration Center are homeless, this facility provides needed case management and follow up services for those who participate in treatment.

**To view the Roll Call video for The Restoration Center, visit [www.youtube.com/watch?v=6KjmVoTWyrs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6KjmVoTWyrs)**

## OUTCOMES

Bexar County has become a national model for jail diversion for people with mental illnesses. In addition, outcome data from the program has served as a model in moving the Texas Legislature to require state-approved jail diversion plans for all community mental health centers in the state.

Program outcomes include:

- More than 95 percent of Bexar County and San Antonio law enforcement officers have been trained in crisis intervention training – over 5,000 officers.
- The Crisis Care Center and the Restoration Center see about 2,200 people per month or 26,000 people per year who used to go to jails or emergency rooms or return to the streets.
- Prior to the Crisis Care Center and the Restoration Center, law enforcement officers spent an average of 12 to 14 hours in emergency rooms waiting on psychiatric evaluations. Officers now wait about 15 minutes.
- The county saves more than \$10 million per year on averted jail costs and emergency room costs.

## RESOURCE

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## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Bexar County, Texas. U.S. Census Bureau. Available at: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/48029.html>. Accessed September 3, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Bexar County Adult Detention Center Facility, Accessed September 4, 2015. [www.bexar.org/749/Adult-Detention-Center-Facility](http://www.bexar.org/749/Adult-Detention-Center-Facility)

<sup>3</sup> Bexar County Adult Detention Center Facility, Accessed September 4, 2015. [www.bexar.org/749/Adult-Detention-Center-Facility](http://www.bexar.org/749/Adult-Detention-Center-Facility)

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