



NEWS RELEASE

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NACo publication: Addressing inmates' health needs a major priority for county jails

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The National Association of Counties ([NACo](http://www.naco.org)) today released [*Addressing Mental Illness and Medical Conditions in County Jails*](#) that explores the complex challenges counties face in addressing the comprehensive health needs of jail populations. [Three case studies](#) examining the strategies counties use to address the health needs of incarcerated individuals accompany the study.

"Individuals in county jails are more likely to have mental illnesses or medical conditions than the general population, and addressing inmates' health needs is a significant priority for counties," said Dr. Natalie Ortiz, the publication's author. "Meeting the needs of this population requires county jails to collaborate with health professionals and treatment providers."

The report includes three main findings. First, a large share of the jail population has a mental illness or medical condition, often accompanied by substance use disorders. Based on an analysis of U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) data, 40 percent of inmates have a chronic medical condition and 64 percent have a mental illness.

Second, county jails identified addressing the health needs of the jail population as their most common concern. Nearly three-quarters of respondent county jails prioritize ways to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in jails and nearly half face challenges in coordinating mental health treatment for inmates.

Third, a small number of county jails supervise jail inmates outside of confinement in mental health or medical treatment programs. Twenty-two percent of respondent county jails indicated having community-based supervision programs that provided behavioral health treatment outside of the jail.

Accompanying the research brief are case studies that describe efforts in three counties.

- [Cook County, Ill.](#) and [King County, Wash.](#) demonstrate the role of county jails in Medicaid enrollment.
- [Montgomery County, Md.](#) illustrates collaborative approaches and partnerships between county health and justice agencies.

"Counties work to balance public safety, jail population management and diverse healthcare needs in communities across the country," said Ortiz. County governments own and operate the majority of all jails in the U.S. and invest \$70 billion in the criminal justice system each year. County governments invest an additional \$70 billion a year in health systems.

Earlier this year, NACo, the Council of State Governments Justice Center and the American Psychiatric Association Foundation launched *Stepping Up: A National Initiative to Reduce the Number of People with*

Mental Illnesses in Jails. Since then, more than 125 counties have passed resolutions in support of the initiative and pledged to take action. For more information about *Stepping Up*, visit www.naco.org/stepping-initiative.

This publication was released in conjunction with NACo's Large Urban County Caucus [Safe and Secure Counties](#) Symposium in King County, Wash. To read the full research brief, *Addressing Mental Illness and Medical Conditions in County Jails*, and the accompanying case studies, visit www.naco.org/jailhealthservices.

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The [National Association of Counties](#) (NACo) unites America's 3,069 county governments. Founded in 1935, NACo brings county officials together to advocate with a collective voice on national policy, exchange ideas and build new leadership skills, pursue transformational county solutions, enrich the public's understanding of county government and exercise exemplary leadership in public service. More information at: www.naco.org.