

PACIFIC COUNTY, WASH.

## Connection to Services Through Jail Screening and Referral



**POPULATION:**  
20,920

Pacific County is a small, rural community on the southern coast of Washington State. In 2015, Pacific County received a Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program (JMHCP) planning grant from the U.S. Department of Justice to create a data-driven plan to address the number of people with mental illnesses coming into its jail. Shortly after, the county board of commissioners passed a resolution to join the national *Stepping Up* initiative. The county convened a core team for planning and executing the county's identified priorities, including the jail administrator, a JMHCP coordinator, a jail liaison, the therapeutic courts coordinator and the public health director. Following its planning grant, the county received additional JMHCP funding, as well as state funding, to implement the plan. In May 2018, Pacific County was selected for the inaugural cohort of *Stepping Up* Innovator Counties due to its efforts to accurately identify and collect data on individuals with mental illnesses coming into its jail.

### Screening & Assessment

Recognizing that jail staff could not get started with connecting people to services until they were able to accurately identify individuals with mental illnesses, the Pacific County Sheriff's Office implemented a process to identify people as they are booked using the Brief Jail Mental Health Screen (BJMHS). Jail staff now screen all individuals booked into the jail for symptoms of serious mental illness (SMI) using the BJMHS and the results are entered into an electronic jail management system. Since the tool was implemented in June 2017, more than 500 people have been screened. Those who screen positive are assigned a mental health flag in that system, which can be accessed by both corrections and law enforcement officers and staff. A grant-funded jail liaison reviews and interprets all screening forms and administers the Global Appraisal of Individual Needs – Short Screener (GAIN-SS) on all individuals – regardless of BJMHS results – to further identify or rule out a potential mental illness or substance use disorder.

If a person screens positive for a mental illness or co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorder (co-occurring disorder), the jail liaison will conduct a risk assessment using the Ohio Risk Assessment System (ORAS) and connect that individual to a mental health clinician to do a full assessment to determine the presence of SMI. The state mandates that these assessments be conducted within 48 hours. The clinician investigates whether the presence of SMI had any nexus with the commission of the crime to help determine if the person would be eligible for a mental health diversion program that expedites release from jail and provides treatment in the community setting. If a person screens positive for a substance use disorder only, he or she will go through a similar process with the jail liaison and the substance use provider and be referred to the appropriate treatment or program.

In collaboration with the *Stepping Up* initiative, the *Data-Driven Justice initiative* and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's *Safety and Justice Challenge*, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) convened a Best Practices Implementation Academy to Reduce the Number of People with Mental Illnesses and Substance Use Disorders in Jails (BPIA) in April 2018 in Alexandria, Va. At the BPIA, delegations from 24 jurisdictions involved in one or more of the three initiatives met to showcase best practice strategies and advance implementation efforts to prevent or reduce the jail involvement of individuals with mental illnesses and substance use disorders.

This case study is part of a series highlighting the six counties that constituted the "Best Practices" teams representing the *Data-Driven Justice initiative* and the *Stepping Up* initiative at the BPIA.

## Connection to Services

Being a rural county with limited resources and staff, Pacific County has limited capacity to provide treatment and services to people in the jail. However, through federal and state grants as well as regional and local funding, staff have various mechanisms for connecting individuals to treatment and services. The jail liaison can refer those with mental illnesses and/or co-occurring disorders to a mental health diversion program led by the prosecutor, mental health professionals and the mental health coordinator. He can also refer an individual to mental health services inside the jail and will assist with reentry planning by connecting the person to community-based providers. Those with substance use disorders have the option of participating in drug court or in-jail treatment services and the jail liaison will assist with reentry planning.

## Using Data to Improve Systems

A key priority for Pacific County is the collection and analysis of data on individuals with mental illnesses and/or co-occurring disorders in its justice system. The county collects data to ensure that the processes it has put in place to screen and assess individuals and refer them to treatment are working effectively. These include output data points such as the number and percentage of people who are screened at booking, how many of these individuals screened positive for symptoms of serious mental illness, the number of individuals who screen positive who are then referred for a clinical assessment and the percentage of these individuals who are referred to services.

The county also collects data to support the sustainability of its initiative and compares data to an established baseline. It tracks initiative outcomes based on the four key measures recommended by *Stepping Up*:

1. Number of people with serious mental illness booked into the jail
2. Their average length of stay
3. How many are connected to community-based treatment upon release; and
4. Their recidivism rates.

The county's intention with collecting and analyzing this information is that it will help to inform policy and practice and help justify the need for continued funding and support for the initiative.

SAMHSA contracted with Policy Research Associates (PRA), which operates SAMHSA's GAINS Center for Behavioral Health and Justice Transformation, to facilitate the BPIA. Additional partners included the lead organizations of the **Stepping Up initiative** (the National Association of Counties, the American Psychiatric Association Foundation and The Council of State Governments Justice Center), the **Data-Driven Justice initiative** (the National Association of Counties and the Laura and John Arnold Foundation) and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's **Safety and Justice Challenge**.

**For more information on this county's efforts, please contact:**

**Rosanne McPhail**  
Human Services Program  
Specialist  
Justice and Mental Health  
Collaboration Program  
**rmcphail@co.pacific.wa.us**

### National Association of Counties

660 North Capitol Street Northwest • Suite 400  
Washington, D.C. 20001 • 202.393.6226 • [www.NACo.org](http://www.NACo.org)

[fb.com/NACoDC](https://fb.com/NACoDC) • [@NACoTweets](https://twitter.com/NACoTweets) • [youtube.com/NACoVideo](https://youtube.com/NACoVideo) • [NACo.org/linkedin](https://NACo.org/linkedin)

