

Six Questions Case Studies



Stepping Up is a national initiative to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in jails. In January 2017, the Stepping Up partners released *Reducing the Number of People with Mental Illnesses in Jail: Six Questions County Leaders Need to Ask (Six Questions)*, a report outlining a framework for counties to assess their existing efforts to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in jails. With the release of the report, the initiative hosted a series of webinars and network calls to outline some of the key strategies within the report and feature counties that have been working through the *Six Questions* process. The Stepping Up *Six Questions* Case Studies serve as a quick reference to the counties highlighted in this series. More information on the *Six Questions* and the webinar recording featuring this county are available on the **Stepping Up Resources Toolkit**.



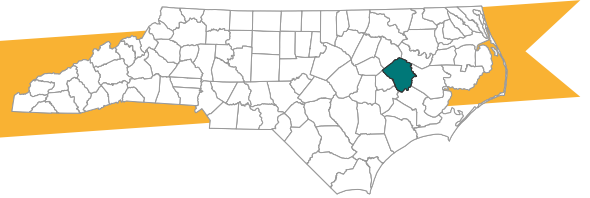
Question 1

Is Our Leadership Committed?

Reducing the number of adults with mental illnesses in jails requires a cross-systems, collaborative approach involving a system-wide planning team. Planning teams may already exist in the form of a criminal justice coordinating council or mental health task force, or your county may decide to create a new planning team. Planning teams should include, at a minimum, county elected officials such as commissioners or supervisors, criminal justice and behavioral health leaders, representatives from the courts, people with mental illnesses or their family members and other relevant community stakeholders. Designating a person to coordinate the planning team's meetings and activities and to manage details will push the initiative plans forward. In addition, an elected official should be designated as the planning team chairperson, as strong leadership from elected officials is essential to rally county agencies in these efforts.

QUESTION 1 IN ACTION

PITT COUNTY, N.C.



POPULATION: **168,152**

In 2015, while struggling with high numbers of people with mental illnesses and substance use disorders in the jail that were driving up the jail population, Pitt County conducted a study of the 25 highest utilizers of its jail. The study revealed that these individuals accounted for over 480 jail admissions and more than 20,000 jail bed days since the year 2000, which pushed leaders to take an active role in addressing this issue head on. Pitt County passed a resolution to join the Stepping Up initiative in August 2015 and received a Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program grant from the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance to further its Stepping Up efforts.

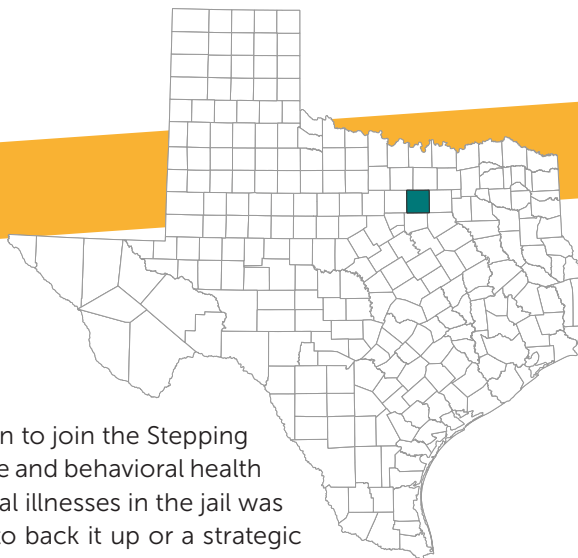
As part of these efforts, county leaders created two teams: a planning team and a policy team. The planning team includes representatives from county government, the Sheriff's Office, the hospital system, Local Management Entity/Managed Care Organizations (LME/MCOs), behavioral health providers, the public defender's office, the district attorney's office, the judicial branch, law enforcement, probation and parole, the department of social services and

the local homeless shelter. Recommendations from the planning team are funneled up to the policy team, which consists of the heads of these various agencies and several elected officials, which makes decisions on policy changes or funding appropriations. The policy team also provides periodic updates to the Board of County Commissioners on the activities and progress of the two teams. While still in its planning stage, having the two-team structure in place, as well as an open line of communication with county policymakers, has helped Pitt County collaboratively plan for and start to implement policies and programs to help reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in the jail.

QUESTION 1 IN ACTION

TARRANT COUNTY, TEXAS

POPULATION: 1,810,614



The Tarrant County Commissioners Court passed a resolution to join the Stepping Up initiative in May 2015. The Court and county criminal justice and behavioral health leaders understood that the number of individuals with mental illnesses in the jail was a major issue for their community, but didn't have the data to back it up or a strategic plan to address it. They also knew that they were not going to be able to tackle this issue without an elected champion and a broad base of support from county and community leaders. Commissioner Roy Charles Brooks "stepped up" to be that champion and tapped into the existing Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee (CJCC) to serve as the convener on this topic.

Tarrant County's CJCC was established through a Commissioners Court Order, and the membership is appointed by the Commissioners Court. The CJCC provides an ongoing countywide forum for leaders from criminal justice agencies, government administration and community groups to collectively discuss public safety and criminal justice topics and ways to address these issues in the most evidence-based, cost-effective and equitable ways possible. It brings together local leaders to form a unique, policy-level forum to strengthen interagency coordination, communication and cooperation. The CJCC has a paid staff person to coordinate meetings and the work of the committee along with 67 members, including county commissioners, county judge, sheriff, county IT director, county budget director, county administrator, county judicial administrator, probation director, county clerk, pretrial release director, medical examiner, community development director, county auditor, district attorney, district clerk and public health director. While the CJCC is tasked with a variety of issues, reducing the number of people with mental illnesses in the jail is a high priority for the committee.

Tarrant County decided to use its own resources to contract with a local university to conduct a jail study and make recommendations on how to systematically address the growing number of people with mental illnesses in the jail. The university shared recommendations with the CJCC, including the need to come together as a group to determine shared language, values and goals for reducing the number of people with mental illnesses in the county jail. The well-established collaborative body and the inclusion of an outside perspective on the gaps and opportunities within the county have given Tarrant County the push it needs to jump start its efforts to put into place a continuum of services and supports for people with mental illnesses to break the cycle of incarceration.

Stepping Up is a national initiative to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in jails and is the result of a partnership between the National Association of Counties, The Council of State Governments Justice Center and the American Psychiatric Association Foundation. For more information, visit www.stepuptogether.org.



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