

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 3

Do We Have Baseline Data?

Baseline data highlight where some of the best opportunities exist to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in the jail and provide benchmarks against which progress can be measured. The following four key measures are important indicators for counties to track and can help structure county efforts to address these challenges.

- The number of people with mental illnesses booked into jail
- Their average length of stay
- The percentage of people with mental illnesses connected to treatment; and
- Their recidivism rates.

Counties may consider comparing these four key measures to those of the general population in the jail to identify disparities. These comparisons can be especially useful when data on both populations are disaggregated further by charge type, criminogenic risk level, race, gender or other demographic factors.

QUESTION 3 IN ACTION

ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY, GA.

POPULATION: **115,453**



In 2015, Athens-Clarke County received a Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program grant from the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance to help formalize the county's planning activities to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in the jail and develop a data collection process to inform local decision making. With the grant, the county developed a core collaborative group to lead planning efforts, including representatives from the local behavioral health services provider, the jail, the police department, the local court system and the University of Georgia's J.W. Fanning Institute, which was contracted to fulfill grant requirements.

After completing a comprehensive systems process analysis and identifying gaps and services in the county, the group realized that the missing piece was having data on the individuals who move through the behavioral health and justice

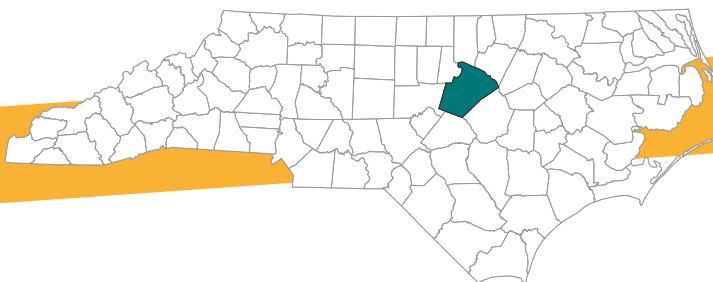
systems. Advantage Behavioral Health Systems (Advantage) – the 10-county behavioral health provider covering Athens-Clarke County – partnered with the jail to do a point-in-time study of arrested individuals to determine a baseline prevalence rate for mental illness in the jail. The sheriff provided Advantage with arrest data during a three-month period, which Advantage then matched to its electronic health records to identify clients with behavioral health diagnoses. Once clients were identified, Advantage used the jail management system to determine the average number of lifetime arrests of its clients, their average length of stay in the jail and their recidivism rates. Advantage then compared data for its clients with those of the individuals arrested during this time who were not clients. Advantage clients had higher average numbers of arrests over their lifetimes, longer average lengths of stay and higher recidivism rates than their counterparts who were not clients. Advantage also looked at charge records for a subset of its clients and found that their most frequent charges were parole and probation violations, signifying a need for further collaboration with community supervision partners.

Having this localized data gave the collaborative group the evidence it needed to justify changes to policy and practice in the county. The Athens-Clarke County Commission passed a resolution in April 2017 to join the Stepping Up initiative, and the county used these data to apply for two federal grant opportunities to support its efforts. The jail has started implementing a screening and assessment process to better identify individuals in need of behavioral health services and is developing a system-wide record management system to allow for a more systematic way of tracking and analyzing data on people with mental illnesses in the jail. While the process of establishing baseline data was arduous, these data have increased the county's capacity to understand its jail population and advocate for needed changes.

QUESTION 3 IN ACTION

WAKE COUNTY, N.C.

POPULATION: 901,037



Due to local and state changes in the way mental health care was administered, Wake County, which had previously seen a drop in its overall jail population, started to see an increase in the number of people with mental illnesses coming into its jails. In 2014, the county was awarded a grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to conduct a Sequential Intercept Mapping exercise to help stakeholders better understand how individuals with mental illnesses interact with the behavioral health and justice systems. Following the mapping exercise, Wake County formed the Criminal Justice Mental Health Advisory Committee to address some of the identified gaps. In 2016, Wake County passed a resolution to join the Stepping Up initiative to create a system-wide plan to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in the jail.

One of the committee's first steps was to engage a researcher at North Carolina State University to help the county analyze jail data. The Sheriff's Office was screening individuals for symptoms of serious mental illness using the Brief Jail Mental Health Screen at booking, and researchers used this information, along with records on medications, charges and release dates and demographic data, to do an initial analysis. It became clear in the process that jail staff was under-detecting symptoms at intake and that additional screening and follow-up clinical assessments would be beneficial to help more accurately identify those in need. Having the screening process in place is helping the county to establish a proxy baseline prevalence number that will be used to then analyze the costs associated with services for people with various levels of mental illnesses. Having accurate, local data on the prevalence of mental illness in jail and associated costs will help the county garner support for implementing mechanisms to connect people in need to community-based services upon release from jail and reduce recidivism rates.

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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