



Developing A Better Understanding

Ohio Association of
COUNTY
BEHAVIORAL
HEALTH
AUTHORITIES

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE *PARTNERING TO ADDRESS OHIO'S OPIATE EPIDEMIC*

The opiate epidemic in Ohio has impacted our society in unprecedented ways. This impact spreads into the criminal justice system. An increasing number of individuals are entering the criminal justice system every day in Ohio as a result of their use or abuse of substances, including opiates and heroin. As Ohio strives to end this epidemic, all sectors of society need to be at the table working to resolve the many varied challenges of this epidemic. In order to increase recovery rates and reduce recidivism rates, Ohio must work at both the state and local levels to develop and implement programs and strategies that will most effectively serve Ohio's citizens. This includes increased partnerships between the criminal justice and community mental health and addiction systems.

“Studies show that approximately 80% of persons incarcerated within DRC facilities have histories of drug or alcohol addiction. Nearly 30,000 of those incarcerated have a considerable or moderate treatment need, but current resources limit treatment availability to reaching only about 4,500 of those in prison. Inmates with non-violent drug charges tend to have shorter sentences within the DRC system and have limited access to addiction treatment while incarcerated. If left untreated, these individuals are at a high risk of relapsing and returning to criminal behavior, placing them and their communities at risk.”

~ Gary Mohr, Director, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction before the Transportation Subcommittee of the House Finance Committee in March, 2015

Sequential Intercept Model:

One model for increasing efficiencies through community coordination that is underway in many communities is the sequential intercept. The Sequential Intercept Model provides a framework for understanding how individuals with mental illness and/or addiction interact with the criminal justice system. According to the developers, this model helps communities identify the series of points where interventions can be made to prevent individuals from entering the criminal justice system or becoming further involved. The model also helps community partners better understand all components of the systems in order to develop a joint decision-making process and coordinate efforts to help individuals successfully move through the criminal justice and community behavioral health care systems.

Drug Courts:

Drug Courts represent another area of successful partnership between the criminal justice and community behavioral health system. Ohio has a continually increasing number of drug courts being established to provide alternatives to incarceration. According to the National Drug Court Model, the mission of drug courts is to stop the abuse of alcohol and other drugs and related criminal activity. Drug courts promote recovery through a coordinated response to offenders dependent on alcohol and other drugs. Realization of these goals requires a team approach, including the cooperation and collaboration of the judges, prosecutors, defense counsel, probation authorities, other corrections personnel, law enforcement, pre-trial services agencies, TASC programs, evaluators, an array of local services providers, and the greater community. In Ohio, many drug courts are responding to the opiate epidemic in their community by connecting individuals with opiate addictions who are involved with the criminal justice system with medication-assisted treatment and the counseling and support services they need to help them achieve and maintain recovery.

Housing, Employment, Transportation, and Treatment

As communities throughout the state work to provide appropriate services and supports to individuals and families working to achieve and maintain recovery in order to gain back their lives, they must work to address the addiction and the criminogenic factors with a recovery-oriented approach. OACBHA, in partnership with a number of state and local partners, developed and published the “*Criminal Justice and Behavioral Healthcare: Housing, Employment, Transportation, and Treatment*” white paper. This white paper, available at www.oacbha.org, outlines in detail the critical resources needed to advance recovery, reduce recidivism, promote positive public safety, and produce positive health outcomes. A summary of the findings by category is included below:

Housing:

One of the greatest barriers for individuals reentering the community post-incarceration is finding safe and stable housing. Many individuals reenter the community with many disadvantages resulting from their criminal history, outdated job skills, and limited educational attainment. Housing options that have proven to be successful including Permanent Supportive Housing, Transitional Housing, and Recovery Housing are under resourced and often difficult for individuals with a criminal history to access. Recommended solutions for this problem include:

- Expanding access to section 8 vouchers for individuals engaged in judicial programs;
- Removing local barriers limiting ex-offenders from accessing public housing resources;
- Expanding Returning Home Ohio (RHO) providers to new communities; and
- Rehabilitating abandoned housing to increase housing stock.

Employment:

The employment needs of individuals with an addiction and a criminal record are extensive. A disproportionate number of ex-offenders do not possess a high school diploma. Limited educational attainment combined with a criminal record often results in lower employment numbers and lower income. Opportunities to increase employment success for individuals reentering the community exist through:

- Developing more job-readiness programs;
- Connecting with local Chambers of Commerce;
- Engaging business partners with reentry coalitions;
- Working to develop a better understanding of the “Certification of Qualification for Employment” program;
- Developing a uniform message to discuss the benefits of hiring individuals with a criminal record; and
- Improving awareness of and access to state vocational rehabilitation services.

Transportation:

Often numerous gaps and barriers exist in community transportation options, including: hours of operation, range of services, travel time for remote or rural areas, eligibility criteria, complexity of transportation systems, access to updated information, etc. Additional challenges arise when an individual can’t access transportation to and from work as well as mandated probation and treatment appointments. Responses to this challenge are not easy and there is not a one size fits all solution. Local communities must work to identify the risks and needs of the individuals in their community and respond to the challenges and barriers specific to the population.

Treatment:

The presence of individuals with an addiction within the criminal justice system over the past decade has become increasingly evident. As a result, evidence-based practices have been developed to specifically and effectively address the complex needs of this population. The need for treatment services is real and the universal understanding of this continues to increase. Evidence-based practices, community linkage programs, therapeutic communities, specialized dockets, peer supports, medication-assisted treatment programs, and risk assessment tools have all been shown as effective models to help this population.

Recovery is Beautiful, but it is rarely a linear process. Communities throughout Ohio are developing Recovery-Oriented Systems of Care in order to bring together community partners and programs to work together to increase recovery rates while also striving to reduce recidivism rates for Ohioans with an addiction who are involved with the criminal justice system.