

Improving Mental Health Treatment in Dane County and Keeping People Out of the Criminal Justice System

The criminal justice system is not designed to meet the needs of people needing mental health care. Yet, today, a large portion of people in the Dane County Jail have mental health issues (nearly 40% are receiving psychotropic medications) and there is a high racial disparity in this population. Many stakeholders in the county are now working to reduce the number of people with mental health issues who are incarcerated in the jail and are searching for effective approaches to achieve this objective. As a contribution to this effort, MOSES (Madison Organizing in Strength, Equality, and Solidarity) offers the following Desired Future Conditions to describe an improved criminal justice system, an improved mental health care delivery system, and the kind of community in which we desire to live.

DESIRED FUTURE CONDITIONS

Dane County Mental Health System

1. There is timely access to effective mental health care for everyone in Dane County through a coordinated system of providers, regardless of payer status. Trauma-informed care practices are an essential part of the system.
2. There is a coordinated approach among service providers, referring organizations, first responders, etc. to help people navigate the system and find the services that they need, including housing, transportation, employment, and other supportive services.
3. Case management (identification of needs and coordination of services) is available to all individuals who need it, bridging provider and agency boundaries. Peer support specialists are involved throughout the system.

Dane County Crisis/Restoration Center and Crisis Management

4. A Crisis/Restoration Center (providing mental health urgent care services 24 hours a day) is available to anyone in the community needing such services. The Crisis/Restoration Center provides immediate triage and stabilization followed by seamless/uninterrupted access to community services for longer-term treatment as needed. These services include treatment for co-occurring substance abuse disorders as needed.
5. First Responders (law enforcement officers, fire, EMS, 911 dispatchers), when responding to a call, have access to professional mental health consultation (in person on the scene, or through phone consultation) regarding background information and in making a decision on the appropriate next steps and/or facility placement for the individuals involved or needing assistance.
6. The Crisis/Restoration Center provides a viable treatment option in lieu of charging people with a crime and booking them into the Dane County Jail.

7. Dane County embraces and has established policies and procedures to direct people with mental illness who have a police contact to a treatment facility or program rather than into the criminal justice system. All First Responders are trained to identify and respond appropriately to people having a mental health crisis.
8. The Department of Corrections, Division of Community Corrections proactively determines needs for services for those on probation and supervision and assures that appropriate clients receive treatment from the mental health care delivery system as a way of improving compliance with rules, in lieu of probation holds and seeking revocation to state prison.

Dane County Jail Policy and Procedures

9. Jail intake personnel are trained and empowered to identify people with mental health issues who need to be diverted to the Crisis/Restoration Center.
10. The psychiatric services contractor is empowered to identify people in the jail who need to be moved to a mental health treatment center to prevent decompensation, and to recommend such action to jail supervision.
11. There are measurable definitions for identifying people in the jail who have mental health issues and these definitions are utilized by trained personnel to implement and regularly and transparently evaluate best practices. People with mental health challenges are not subjected to solitary confinement and/or sensory deprivation.
12. The jail emphasizes continuity of care for people with mental health issues. This care includes connecting with providers in the community, maintaining current medications, and doing reentry planning that connects individuals to mental health and other supportive services when they are released.

Administration and Management

13. Key stakeholders from the mental health system, the criminal justice system, and the community meet at least quarterly as partners in overseeing the management of these two systems.
14. Data is developed and used to manage and evaluate the systems and is also shared with the public in meaningful and transparent ways to enable citizens to understand the operations of our criminal justice systems. Programs and policies are evidence-based and routinely assessed to provide accountability.
15. While respecting HIPAA and other confidentiality requirements, information is shared among agencies and providers to better serve individuals with mental health issues. Family involvement is sought in order to develop and provide support for effective, holistic treatment plans.