

# THE STEPPING UP INITIATIVE



THE OHIO PROJECT



## The Problem

Each year there are an estimated 2 million people with serious mental illnesses admitted to U.S. jails and almost three-quarters of adults with serious mental illnesses in jails have co-occurring substance use disorders. The toll incarceration takes on these individuals and their families, as well as the costs assumed by taxpayers, is staggering. Jails have become de facto in-patient psychiatric facilities across the nation with little impact on public safety. Ohio is no exception, with as many as 30 percent or more of the individuals in jails having mental illnesses.

## Ohio Steps Up

A growing number of Ohio counties are joining with their counterparts across the country to engage in Stepping Up, a national initiative to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in jails. The initiative was launched in May 2015 by the Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center, the National Association of Counties, and the American Psychiatric Association Foundation, with support from the U.S. Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Assistance, to help people with mental illnesses and co-occurring substance use disorders safely stay out of jails and on a path to recovery. In Ohio, leaders in Franklin County have announced one of the most comprehensive plans to date to overhaul responses to people with mental illnesses who are cycling through the criminal justice system. This type of engagement and resolve across the state has sparked a special Ohio Stepping Up effort led by county and state leaders, with support from the CSG Justice Center. This effort is generously funded by Peg's Foundation and the Gund Foundation.

**"Too many Ohioans with serious mental illness and substance use disorders are lingering in our jails—not getting the help they need." – Tracy Plouck, Director, Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services**

## Getting Started With Ohio Stepping Up

To make this effort a success, all Ohio county leaders are encouraged to sign up for Ohio Stepping Up and pass a resolution that includes a commitment to a six-step planning process. Counties that pass a resolution in support of the national Stepping Up initiative, not only demonstrate their commitment to reducing the number of people with mental illnesses and co-occurring substance use disorders in jail but also benefit from Ohio specific resources. Peg's Foundation has retained Retired Justice Evelyn Lundberg Stratton to serve as Project Director and Melissa Knopp, Esq., to serve as Project Coordinator to lead the Ohio efforts.



## FOUR WAYS YOU CAN BENEFIT FROM OHIO STEPPING UP

### 1. Access the Stepping Up Toolkit

Make sure your county has signed up to receive Stepping Up announcements at <https://stepuptogether.org/take-action>. By signing up, your county will receive a link to the Stepping Up toolkit, which includes written planning guides, training webinars, and relevant publications. Drawing on this assistance, counties can create actionable plans to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in jails. All counties will assign a County Coordinator as a contact point.

### 2. Participate in a free readiness assessment to determine what you have and what you need

Our team will work directly with your county to assess the current status of data collection for and policies and practices to address people with mental illness and substance use disorders in the criminal justice system. The results of this readiness assessment can help your county prioritize areas to tackle in your plan to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in jail. To participate, email Melissa Knopp, Esq., at [knoppm@steppingupohio.org](mailto:knoppm@steppingupohio.org)

### 3. Receive free technical assistance with your county plan

Stepping Up Ohio participants will have access to resources that provide guidance and updates on learning opportunities, peer exchanges, and other technical assistance. For more information, please check out the OhioMHAS Stepping Up webpage at: [www.mha.ohio.gov/steppingup](http://www.mha.ohio.gov/steppingup). You may also contact Kathy Yokum at [kathy.yokum@mha.ohio.gov](mailto:kathy.yokum@mha.ohio.gov) for further details regarding technical assistance.

### 4. Ohio Stepping Up conference

Once a year all registered Ohio Stepping Up counties attended a one-day conference that brought state and local leaders from across Ohio together with partners from the national initiative to identify strategies to build local capacity and connect with training and technical assistance resources. The 2018 conference will be held October 22 at the Quest Center in Columbus; all registered Ohio Stepping Up Counties will be invited to participate.

**To learn more about Ohio Stepping Up and the opportunities available through this initiative, please contact Project Coordinator Melissa Knopp, Esq., at [knoppm@steppingupohio.org](mailto:knoppm@steppingupohio.org).**