



City of Alexandria, VA

Alexandria Community Services Board
Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse

News Release

Alexandria Officials Tackle Treatment of Mental Illness in Community and Jail

November 9, 2010

News Highlight

- Elected City officials and leaders from Alexandria's criminal justice and mental health systems met to develop plans to further enhance services for adults with mental illness who come in contact with the justice system in order to reduce recidivism and help these individuals lead safe, law-abiding lives.

More Information

- [Jail Diversion and the Crisis Intervention Team](#) [Cross Systems Mapping Workshop Presentation](#)

City of Alexandria officials held a 1.5 day work session to develop integrated strategies for identifying and responding to the needs of justice-involved adults with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders.

Hosted by Police Chief Earl Cook, Sheriff Dana Lawhorne and Liz Wixson, Director of Clinical and Emergency Services at the Alexandria Community Services Board, City staff, elected officials and community experts met to develop a plan to halt the recidivistic criminal justice cycle experienced by many persons with mental illness. Mayor William D. Euille, City Manager Jim Hartmann, Commonwealth Attorney Randy Sengel, Public Defender Melinda Douglas, and several judges were in attendance, as were key leaders from across Alexandria's criminal justice and mental health systems. The meeting was sponsored by the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services.

Using a tool developed by Policy Research Associates, attendees identified existing community resources, service gaps and opportunities for improved service coordination between mental health, substance abuse and criminal justice professionals. Participants developed a map detailing the flow of criminal justice contact from arrest to incarceration, referral and access to services, and points for diversion from the justice system. The workshop was intended to foster systemic change and provide the community with the tools necessary to enhance services for adults with mental illness and co-occurring substance use disorders who come in contact with the justice system.

Individuals with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders are an increasing presence in the criminal justice system. In July 2010, 45% (114 of 256) Alexandria Detention Center inmates (non-Federal) had a mental illness diagnosis; half of them with a serious mental illness (schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or major depression). National studies have shown that 6.4% of men and 12.2% of women entering U.S. jails have a serious and persistent mental illness, compared to less than 2% of the general population. Of these individuals, 72% have a co-occurring substance use disorder. Because these individuals who enter jail will return to the community, effective linkage and access to services is critical in reducing the repetitious cycle of justice involvement.

For more information, contact Liz Wixson at 703-746-3400 or liz.wixson@alexandriava.gov .