

COMPREHENSIVE OVERVIEW

State and Trial Court Leadership Guides and Behavioral Health Resources

Responding effectively to the needs of court-involved individuals with serious mental illness remains a grave national issue and pressing concern...It is the role of the Conference of Chief Justices and Conference of State Court Administrators to lead the state court community in prompting changes to state court policies and practices that will lead to fairer, timelier justice for [those] with serious mental illness....

As leaders of their courts and communities, judges are in a unique position to expand and improve the response to individuals with mental health issues in the community and in the justice system. For decades, courts have gained experience in convening diverse stakeholders to tackle complex problems both within and outside of the justice system. From the evolution of problem-solving courts to dependency dockets, courts are often at the vanguard of responding to societal issues. This reality has paved the way for an independent but involved judiciary. At the national level, state court leadership has recognized the important role courts play in addressing the mental health crisis. An effective response to the needs of individuals with mental health and co-occurring disorders requires committed stakeholders across a spectrum of services and time. From screening and assessment to diagnosis, emergency health responses, probation and beyond, effective mental health responses must be appropriately tailored to the individual.

Since the creation of the National Judicial Task Force to Examine State Courts' Response to Mental Illness (Task Force) in March 2020, the Task Force has developed a wealth of resources for state and local courts to address and improve the response to individuals with serious mental illness who are court-involved.

The cornerstone of these materials are two documents that outline the courts' role in leading change. Below are descriptions of these documents as well as how to find other resources.

LEADING CHANGE GUIDE FOR STATE COURT LEADERS

The [Leading Change Guide for State Court Leaders: Improving the Court and Community's Response to Mental Health and Co-Occurring Disorders](#) is intended to be a practical tool for convening stakeholders across systems and developing a plan to address mental health needs in your state. Court and behavioral health structures differ between states, but the advice in the guide is designed to apply universally. It focuses on state-level policies and systems, but also on how those policies and systems can facilitate and institutionalize change at the local level. The recommended checklist of action steps incorporates plan development considerations

across a diverse set of jurisdictions. While these action steps provide a framework, specific strategies will vary from state to state depending on the existing behavioral health landscape, current coordination efforts, and available resources and resource infrastructure. Addressing the mental health needs in each state is an important but weighty undertaking that will require sustained effort and time. Resources are often siloed, and it will take time to identify and then coordinate them. In their positions as respected leaders, judges are optimal conveners of these diverse stakeholders. The Leading Change Guide for State Court Leaders is intended to assist Chief Justices, State Court Administrators and other state level court officials to develop strategies for statewide implementation of system improvements, then take those improvements to scale.

LEADING CHANGE GUIDE FOR TRIAL COURT LEADERS

Local courts and communities should consider this companion resource [Leading Change Guide for Trial Court Leaders: Improving the Court and Community’s Response to Mental Health and Co-Occurring Disorders](#). To address mental health needs in a community, certain court and community responses must be developed. The most effective approach is to design responses that are being engaged by community collaborators. As a starting place, COSCA recommends using the Sequential Intercept Model (SIM) which identifies appropriate responses at several intercept points that can keep an individual with mental health or co-occurring disorders from continuing to penetrate the criminal justice system. Nevertheless, effective court and community responses require interventions prior to engagement in the criminal justice system.

As such, the guide recommends several additional areas of focus that, if engaged in proactively, can create necessary support structures and prevent justice system involvement for those with mental health disorders. These additional practices address physical and behavioral health needs, pre-crisis community resources, family and public outreach, and civil justice needs. Additionally, focus should be placed on the role of court leaders and the importance of data and information sharing. This model is visualized in Figure 1 below.

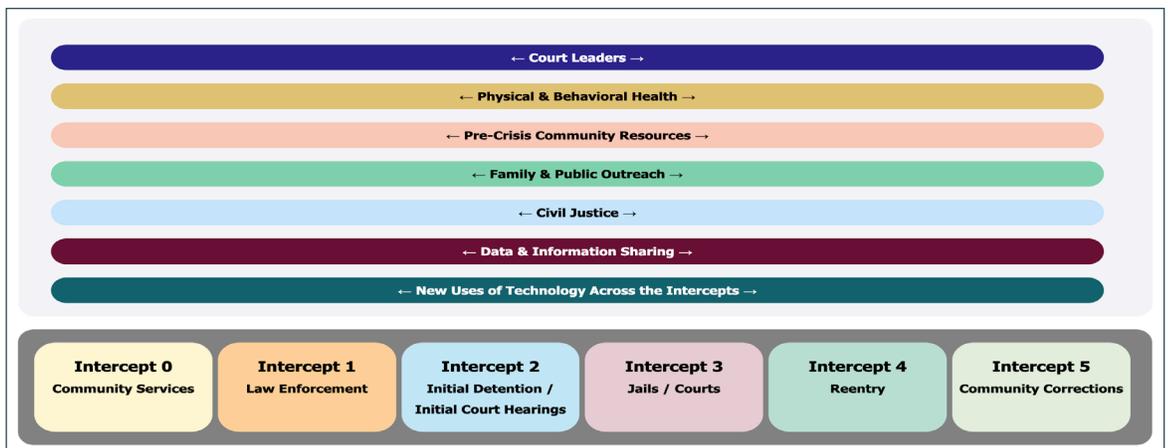


Figure 1. The Sequential Intercept Model and additional areas of focus for coordinated court and community responses.

The Leading Change Guide for Trial Court Leaders will help local judges and court professionals get started and provides information about what to consider during the beginning stages of the process. The guide describes the important steps of convening stakeholders, assessing the mental health landscape in the community, and implementing court and community responses and strategies. Every community will be at a different place with its response to mental health and co-occurring disorders. As court leaders look through the various recommendations in the guide, they should consider their own communities and the best way to use these tools to build a structure of support for those with mental health issues. Any thoughtful steps forward will be positive and will make a difference.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH RESOURCES

Behavioral Health Resources Hub

The [Behavioral Health Resources Hub](#) is a repository of continually updated resource links and information highlighting best practices to help courts and communities provide effective responses to and support for individuals with mental health and co-occurring needs.

Behavioral Health Alerts

The [Behavioral Health Alerts](#) is a bi-monthly newsletter where you can find additional current information on behavioral health-related projects, research, opportunities, and news. Subscribe to the Behavioral Health Alerts [here](#).

These and other resources can be found at the National Center for State Courts Behavioral Health [website](#).



This document was developed under the Mental Health Initiative: Phase II Grant #SJI-20-P-054 from the State Justice Institute and approved by the Task Force Executive Committee. The points of view expressed do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the State Justice Institute.