
Task Force on Community Justice and Mental Illness Early Intervention March 30, 2016 Meeting Summary

On March 30, 2016, the Task Force on Community Justice and Mental Illness Early Intervention met for the first time in Pierre, South Dakota. The 22-member task force was appointed by Chief Justice David Gilbertson and Governor Dennis Daugaard and is supported by the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust. The task force grew out of Chief Justice Gilbertson's concerns over the growing number of competency evaluations ordered and the implications of that increase, and was broadened in scope to take a comprehensive look at mentally ill individuals in the criminal justice system.

Task Force Goals and Process

Following a press conference featuring Governor Daugaard, Chief Justice Gilbertson, and Walter Panzirer, Trustee from the Helmsley Charitable Trust, the task force members reviewed the goals of the group and the process that will be used over the course of the next eight months.

The charge to task force members is to inquire why and how individuals with mental illness come into contact with the criminal justice system, examine the detention of these individuals in county jails, research evidence-based practices and successful reforms from other states, develop tailored policy options for South Dakota, and explore possible reallocation of any potential savings into strategies that improve public safety and the evaluation and treatment of mental illness. The goals of this process are:

- To improve public safety and the treatment of people with mental illness in contact with the criminal justice system through appropriate evaluation, intervention, diversion, and supervision.
- To more effectively identify mental illness in people coming into contact with the criminal justice system, through improved training in local criminal justice systems, better use of screening tools and skills, and expanded response and diversion options in communities for law enforcement and the courts, all while holding offenders and government more accountable.
- To better allocate limited local resources in order to improve early intervention services and preserve limited jail and prison resources for violent, chronic, and career criminals.

Similar to the process employed in the Criminal Justice Initiative and Juvenile Justice Reinvestment Initiative, extensive stakeholder engagement is planned and is expected to influence the understanding of the members and the solutions they propose.

Review of National Data on Mental Illness in the US and People with Mental Illness and the Criminal Justice System

Task force members reviewed national data showing that one in five US adults experiences mental illness in any give year, and that estimates by the US Substance

Abuse and Mental Health Services

Administration place South Dakota's rates of mental illness slightly below the rates of the US as a whole and the state's neighbors. Despite these lower rates, data from the US Department of Health and Human Services indicates South Dakota has significant psychiatric staffing shortages. The task force also reviewed Bureau of Justice Statistics data that showed that the prevalence of mental health problems is far greater for jail inmates than the general population, and that jail inmates with mental health problems are more likely than those without them to have substance abuse or dependence and to be charged with jail rule violations.

Overview of a Survey of South Dakotans

Heidi Schultz, Program Officer for the Helmsley Charitable Trust's Rural Healthcare Program provided a brief overview of a survey funded by the Trust called "Focus on South Dakota - A Picture of Health." The task force members heard about survey's methodology and key findings. There were 7,686 randomly selected households participating, with oversampling in rural counties and American Indian communities. Additional data collection targeted immigrant/refugee individuals in Sioux Falls, homeless individuals in Rapid City and Sioux Falls, and housing insecure individuals. The task force members reviewed data showing higher than average rates of depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as high hospital utilization for mental health conditions. The group also saw data on hotspots – those areas of the state with high prevalence of mental health issues and high unmet need.

The Science Behind Mental Disorders

This initial task force meeting ended with a brief overview of the science of mental disorders by Norwood Knight-Richardson, M.D., M.A., M.B.A., behavioral health consultant for the Helmsley Trust. Dr. Knight Richardson spoke to the group about advances in the field, challenges associated with defining and categorizing mental illness, co-occurring disorders, different types of prevention, and levels of care.

Next Steps

During the next meeting on April 15, 2016, in Sioux Falls, the task force will begin to review South Dakota's criminal justice system as it relates to mental illness.