OVERVIEW

In August of 2016, the Comprehensive Behavioral Health Task Force released an extensive report and an executive summary and fact sheet of issues related to county jail populations with increasing numbers of pre-trial offenders and inmates who suffer from mental illness.

Costs to provide medical care for inmates now exceed $100 billion annually nationwide. The average cost of incarceration in a county jail is approximately $40,000 annually, compared to many community based alternatives that are estimated to cost less than half of that amount. The overriding theme of the action plan is that jails are not the place for many of these individuals. Society must provide care and treatment as well as every possible tool to safely transition those with mental illness and substance abuse issues back into society, in an effort to improve lives, use resources more appropriately and build safer communities.

The Task Force called for comprehensive recommendations that will address behavioral health issues in county jails, such as: encouraging counties to employ successful strategies to control the need for incarceration; expanding training, education and awareness efforts to improve public perception and understanding; providing effective supports and services to reduce entry into the criminal justice system and to improve outcomes for re-entry; understanding special populations and unique circumstances; addressing the needs of returning veterans; and researching larger policy issues and develop longer range policy strategies to assist county efforts.

INDIVIDUAL COUNTIES AND TARGET AUDIENCES

Although many of the materials and education mentioned below will stem from Task Force members and CCAP staff, the recommendations in this Strategic Communication Plan and Toolkit primarily are aimed at involvement from individual counties who can tell their story by engaging various communities, including lawmakers, citizens, judges, local partners, CJAB representatives, media representatives and others.

GOALS

Simply stated, the goals of this strategic communications campaign are for counties to inform, connect, persuade, engage, motivate and influence by:

- expanding constituent understanding of the importance of safely diverting those with mental health and substance abuse issues away from the criminal justice system where possible along with demonstrating a return on investment for a new approach
• helping counties understand how they can use the Task Force report to begin strategizing for themselves
• planning for education of members in the coming months and years
• developing media materials and strategies for use at the county level explaining why a commitment to treatment as an alternative to jail is a benefit to the public, and
• creating a strategy for delivering the report to state and federal partners to seek policy goals established within the report.

STRATEGIES

Strategies to be utilized to achieve awareness, promote action and allow individual counties to build their own roadmap include:
• direct, personal outreach to targeted audiences by Task Force members to expand constituent understanding, discuss Task Force report utilization, and acquire commitment to action on the local level
• finding champions/ambassadors/key communicators
• building alliances and working with partners and stakeholders to establish policy change
• development of educational, informational and media programs and tools for use by county leaders
• placing local human faces on the issues
• localizing issues with data, facts, history, effects

CHALLENGES

Simplifying complicated and controversial subject matter that branches off into many audiences and directions is extremely difficult, even more so when our culture and society have pre-conceived notions about people in jail. County staff resources are limited.

Money essentially is not available to add advertising or other purchased sources of awareness communications.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Success of the Task Force’s goals will require long-term repetition of messages with all audiences, constant communications with key policy makers and partners, and local involvement with media, legislators and the public. Localized messaging is critical. Counties must take the lead and ask themselves what specific messaging is needed for each, particular audience, as well as is wanted from each audience.

COMMUNICATIONS METHODS BY AUDIENCE

Below are suggested action items that tell our story in a way that resonates with individuals and targeted audiences. The suggestion for targeted communications revolves around the slogan “The Wrong People Are In Jail: Why You Should Care,” and what are the solutions. Much of the key to the below is personal contact from counties even though CCAP will provide broad-based
communications templates.

**Reaching Fellow County Commissioners**
- Task Force members could make direct contact with neighboring county counterparts to discuss specifics of the Report and each county’s desire to communicate issues as well as their the ability to create their own roadmap, design approaches that meet the unique needs of their residents, and find suggestions for how to engage other local partners in an effective way to achieve results
- Utilize tool kit templates on the local level for kicking off local CBHTF communications and campaigns
- Coordinate webinars on strategic topics via CCAP
- Coordinate regional meetings via CCAP to educate fellow commissioners, showcase successes and discuss local issues
- Find a local champion in each county for each issue
- Designate primary spokesperson(s) in each county
- Perform conference calls via CCAP and locally in each county
- Make phone calls
- Send emails
- Create CCAP County News magazine articles
- Utilized CCAP e-newsletters (Legislative Bulletin and CCAP Update) when possible
- Utilize CCAP Twitter
- CCAP conferences

**Engaging and Developing Partners**
- Engage partners and promote individual ownership to create champions … human services staffs, corrections staffs, educate DA’s association, trial judges, legislators, law enforcement, behavioral health specialists, public defenders, state mental health association, jail wardens, drug and alcohol stakeholders, CJABs
- Perform local face-to-face meetings
- Make phone calls
- Send emails
- Utilize social media
- Utilize tool kit templates on the local level for kicking off local CBHTF communications and campaigns
- Include partners’ messaging in communications or have them create complementary communications

**Reaching Legislators** (see “Communicating with Your legislative Delegation” later in this document)
- Counties call legislators individually
- Send individual emails
- Meet face-to-face with legislators locally and in Harrisburg
- Invite legislators to related meetings
- Create localized fact sheets
- Advance public policy changes
- Perform local facility tours
• Utilize social media
• Utilize individuals affected by issues to be a face of the issue and to tell their story
• Utilize tool kit templates on the local level for kicking off local CBHTF communications and campaigns

**Engaging and Persuading Media Representatives**

- Include related issues as agenda items at commissioners meetings
- Counties contact individual local reporters by phone
- Email individual reporters
- Invite reporters to local face-to-face meetings
- Send local and statewide (CCAP and counties) editorials
- Send local and statewide (CCAP and counties) news releases
- Request time on statewide (CCAP) radio and TV talk shows
- Request time on local (counties) radio and TV talk shows
- Perform local news conferences with champions and individuals affected by issues
- Perform facility tours
- Utilize social media
- Utilize individuals affected locally by issues to be a face of the issue and to tell their story
- Utilize templates on the local level for kicking off local CBHTF communications and campaigns (sound bites, news release, flier, editorial, newsletter)

**Helping the Public to Understand Importance of Issues**

- Include related issues as agenda items at commissioners meetings
- Request to speak at local community association meetings/public presentations
- Include topics in Town Hall meetings
- Disseminate fliers
- Include issues on your county website under a specific heading
- Display local media articles on website
- Utilize social media
- Perform facility tours
- Place articles in county and local association newsletters
- Utilize individuals affected by issues to be a face of the issue and to tell their story
- Utilize tool kit templates on the local level for kicking off local CBHTF communications and campaigns

**MESSAGING**

Localizing messaging is the key to success for the many goals noted by the Task Force. Below is messaging that can help give a broad overview of the issue. It’s critical to tell your story in a way that resonates with individuals and audiences, asking what’s in it for that audience and what do you want a particular audience to do?
SOUND BITES

- Currently, county jails are the largest mental health facilities in our country; housing staggering numbers of persons with mental health and substance abuse problems. ____ County’s jail is no exception.

- County jails and taxpayers dollars are increasingly being used to detain pre-trial offenders and house inmates who suffer from mental illness. Although offenders must be held accountable for their actions, most of these individuals have not committed serious crimes. Many are female offenders or veterans.

- A more effective use of our limited resources is to safely provide treatment and support to those with mental health and substance abuse issues to enhance the possibility of them becoming productive members of society, sustaining families, building safer communities, and reducing the rate of re-entry.

- The average cost of incarceration in a county jail is approximately $40,000 annually, compared to many community based alternatives that are estimated to cost less than half of that amount. Add your county’s relevant cost information. In ____ County, we must invest in community-based options and produce effective supports and services to reduce entry into the criminal justice system and improve outcomes for re-entry. Jails are not the place to care for individuals with mental illness.

- Counties nationwide spend nearly $100 billion annually on health care for inmates and roughly 65 percent are pre-trial detainees. More than 95 percent of county jail inmates will eventually return to the community, and if mental health and substance abuse issues remain untreated, they are very likely to cycle back into the system through the county jail, again and again.

- Pennsylvania’s incarceration rate was the highest among Northeast states in 2014, after an increase of 20 percent between 2004 and 2014. The number of people in jails over that same time period increased by nine percent. Statistics suggest that as many as 65 percent of Pennsylvania’s county jail inmates have a substance abuse disorder, 10 to 30 percent suffer from mental illness, and up to 14 percent have serious mental illness. Add your county’s statistics in place of or in addition to the above.

- ____ County understands that this is complex and involves serious issues, but have reached a level of frustration over the inability to address illness in jails due to resource limits at the state level. Funding for state and federal human services programs has been on the decline for well over a decade while mandates have increased, with counties expected to assume larger roles without an increase in resources or support. State policy makers must stop adopting legislative proposals that harm our efforts or force a step backwards.

- There is a significant need to engage multiple communities in ____ County, including lawmakers, local staff, citizens, judges and other local partners, and to expand training, education and awareness efforts to improve public perception and understanding in order to create a better society for our children. The return on investment of taxpayer dollars for
the current methods and reasons for incarceration is negligible vs. alternative options to provide enhanced public safety and reduce costs to taxpayers.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

- Approximately 700,000 of the 2.3 million people incarcerated nationwide are in county jails. County jails also have seen the largest growth in population, especially in small counties (population under 250,000), whose jails grew more – 6.7 percent between 1970 and 2014 – than large or mid-size county jails. Small county jails hold 44 percent of county prisoners nationwide, up from 28 percent in 1970.

- Pennsylvania's county jail incarceration rate, 425.0 per 100,000 residents age 15 – 64, is among the highest. ([Vera Institute](https://www.vera.org/about-us), *In Our Own Backyard*, December 2015)

- Pennsylvania's jail population increased by 9,700 people from 1999 to 2013, the second highest number increase in the country. ([Council on State Governments (“CSG”)](https://www.csg.org), *First Presentation to the Pennsylvania Justice Reinvestment Working Group*, March 9, 2016, p. 21)

- More than 80 percent of Pennsylvania sentences are served at the county level, either in jail, on probation, or in county intermediate punishment. (Id., p. 17)

- The number of women incarcerated in small counties increased 31-fold between 1970 and 2014. As crime rates declined nationally, the trend toward jailing women in rural counties continued: Incarceration rates for women in sparsely populated counties rose to 140 per 100,000 in 2014 from 79 per 100,000 in 2000. The vast majority of incarcerated women have drug & alcohol problems. About 80 percent have children. ([Vera Institute, Safety & Justice Challenge](https://www.safetyjusticechallenge.org), *Overlooked: Women & Jails in an Era of Reform*, 8/17/16)

- Many more women prisoners than men suffer from mental illness. For example, in the Pennsylvania state prison system, approximately 67 percent of women prisoners have a mental illness, three times the rate of men. Serious mental illness afflicts 29 percent of women prisoners vs. 7 percent of men. ([Penn Live](http://www.pennlive.com/news/2015/11/mentally_ill_women_pennsylvani.html))


- Of the approximately 37,000 inmates that were in Pennsylvania's county prisons on an average day in 2014, 11,714 had a mental illness and 4,097 had a serious mental illness. ([Penn Live](http://www.pennlive.com/midstate/index.ssf/2015/10/patients_to_prisoners_-_full_c.html#incart_river_index_topics))
THE WRONG PEOPLE ARE IN JAIL: Why You Should Care

By ________, ________ County Commissioner

If your child or spouse or parent had a mental illness, would you want them in jail or somewhere that could help them get better?

County jails and taxpayers dollars are increasingly being used to detain pre-trial offenders and house inmates who suffer from mental illness. Simply stated, county jails are the largest mental health facilities in our country.

Although offenders must be held accountable for their actions, most of these individuals have not committed serious crimes. A more effective use of our limited resources is to safely provide treatment and support to those with mental health and substance abuse issues to enhance the possibility of them becoming productive members of society, sustaining families, building safer communities and reducing the rate of re-entry.

To that end, taxpayer dollars could be better spent. The average cost of incarceration in a county jail is approximately $40,000 annually, compared to many community based alternatives that are estimated to cost less than half of that amount and can produce effective supports and services. Counties nationwide spend nearly $100 billion annually on health care for inmates and roughly 65 percent are pre-trial detainees.

More than 95 percent of county jail inmates will eventually return to the community, and if mental health and substance abuse issues remain untreated, they are very likely to cycle back into the system through the county jail, again and again. Many of the imprisoned are female or veterans who, if treated properly, can substantially contribute to their families and communities. Public safety also can be served by providing these inmates with the proper care.

Pennsylvania’s incarceration rate was the highest among Northeast states in 2014, after an increase of 20 percent between 2004 and 2014. The number of people in jails over that same time period increased by nine percent. Provide your county’s statistics, information, expenditures, etc.

Statistics suggest that as many as 65 percent of Pennsylvania’s county jail inmates have a substance abuse disorder, 10 to 30 percent suffer from mental illness, and up to 14 percent have serious mental illness. The growing opioid epidemic continues to exacerbate the issue. Caring for the damaged and weak in our communities simply is the right thing to do and has permanent positive effects on the lives of everyone touched by those who overcome mental illness and dependency on drugs.

Counties, the primary provider of criminal justice and jail operations, understand that this is complex and involves serious issues, but have reached a level of frustration over the inability to address illness in jails due to resource limits at the state level. Funding for state and federal human services programs has been on the decline for well over a decade while mandates have increased, with counties expected to assume larger roles without an increase in resources or
support. State policy makers must stop adopting legislative proposals that harm our efforts or force a step backwards.

Effective strategies, supports and services must be provided to control the need for incarceration and reduce reentry into the criminal justice system. We must change the perception of who is in jail and seek understanding of special populations and unique circumstances so that positive reform and proper return on investment of taxpayer dollars can take place. Long range strategies and policy issues must be developed to assist counties. Society must provide care and treatment as well as every possible tool to safely transition those with mental illness and substance abuse issues back into society in an effort to improve lives, use resources more effectively, enhance family structures and build safer communities.

For more information, see Comprehensive Behavioral Health headings at http://www.pacounties.org/GR/Pages/Priorities.aspx

NEWS RELEASE TEMPLATE

NEWS RELEASE

Date

CONTACT:
Name, title, phone number, email address

_____ County Addresses Jail Population and Effects on Taxpayers, Families and Communities

County jails and taxpayers dollars are increasingly being used to detain pre-trial offenders and house inmates who suffer from mental illness. Although offenders must be held accountable for their actions, most of these individuals have not committed serious crimes. Currently, county jails are the largest mental health facilities in our country.

_____ County’s position is that taxpayer dollars could be better spent to produce more effective use of limited resources to safely provide treatment and support to those with mental health and substance abuse issues to enhance the possibility of them becoming productive members of society, sustaining families, building safer communities and reducing the rate of re-entry.

_____ noted, “More than 95 percent of county jail inmates will eventually return to the community, and if mental health and substance abuse issues remain untreated, they are very likely to cycle back into the system through the county jail, again and again. Many of the imprisoned are female or veterans who, if treated properly, can substantially contribute to their families and communities. Public safety also can be served by providing these inmates with the proper care. Caring for the damaged and weak in our communities simply is the right thing to do and has permanent positive effects on the lives of everyone touched by those who overcome mental illness and dependency on drugs. If your child or spouse or parent had a mental illness, would you want them in jail or somewhere that could help them get better?”

Statistics suggest that as many as 65 percent of Pennsylvania’s county jail inmates have a substance abuse disorder, 10 to 30 percent suffer from mental illness, and up to 14 percent have
serious mental illness. The growing opioid epidemic continues to exacerbate the issue. Pennsylvania’s incarceration rate was the highest among Northeast states in 2014, after an increase of 20 percent between 2004 and 2014. The number of people in jails over that same time period increased by nine percent.

The average cost of incarceration in a county jail is approximately $40,000 annually, compared to many community based alternatives that are estimated to cost less than half of that amount and can produce effective supports and services. Counties nationwide spend nearly $100 billion annually on health care for inmates and roughly 65 percent are pre-trial detainees.

Provide your county’s statistics, information, expenditures, etc. Include partners’ messaging or quotes, if appropriate.

___, ___ stated, “Counties, the primary provider of criminal justice and jail operations, understand that this is complex and involves serious issues, but have reached a level of frustration over the inability to address illness in jails due to resource limits at the state level. Funding for state and federal human services programs has been on the decline for well over a decade while mandates have increased, with counties expected to assume larger roles without an increase in resources or support. State policy makers must stop adopting legislative proposals that harm our efforts or force a step backwards.”

He continued, “Effective strategies, supports and services must be provided to control the need for incarceration and reduce reentry into the criminal justice system. We must change the perception of who is in jail and seek understanding of special populations and unique circumstances so that positive reform and proper return on investment of taxpayer dollars can take place. Long range strategies and policy issues must be developed to assist counties. Society must provide care and treatment as well as every possible tool to safely transition those with mental illness and substance abuse issues back into society in an effort to improve lives, use resources more effectively, enhance family structures and build safer communities.”

___ County currently is ______ to address the issue. Future plans include ____.

For more information, see Comprehensive Behavioral Health headings at http://www.pacounties.org/GR/Pages/Priorities.aspx

FLIER / NEWSLETTER TEMPLATE

THE WRONG PEOPLE ARE IN JAIL
Why You Should Care

County jails and taxpayers dollars are increasingly being used to detain pre-trial offenders and house inmates who suffer from mental illness. Currently, county jails are the largest mental health facilities in our country. Although offenders must be held accountable for their actions, most of these individuals have not committed serious crimes. A more effective use of our limited resources is to safely provide treatment and support to those with mental health and substance
abuse issues to enhance the possibility of them becoming productive members of society, sustaining families, building safer communities and reducing the rate of re-entry.

“If your child or spouse or parent had a mental illness, would you want them in jail or somewhere that could help them get better?” Jane Smith, ____ County commissioner

YOUR MONEY
Taxpayer dollars could be better spent. The average cost of incarceration in a county jail is approximately $40,000 annually, compared to many community based alternatives that are estimated to cost less than half of that amount and can produce effective supports and services. Counties nationwide spend nearly $100 billion annually on health care for inmates and roughly 65 percent are pre-trial detainees.

FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES
More than 95 percent of county jail inmates will eventually return to the community, and if mental health and substance abuse issues remain untreated, they are very likely to cycle back into the system through the county jail, again and again. Many of the imprisoned are female or veterans who, if treated properly, can substantially contribute to their families and communities. Public safety also can be served by providing these inmates with the proper care.

____ COUNTY
Pennsylvania’s incarceration rate was the highest among Northeast states in 2014, after an increase of 20 percent between 2004 and 2014. The number of people in jails over that same time period increased by nine percent. Provide your county’s statistics, information, expenditures, etc.

THE RIGHT THING TO DO
Statistics suggest that as many as 65 percent of Pennsylvania’s county jail inmates have a substance abuse disorder, 10 to 30 percent suffer from mental illness, and up to 14 percent have serious mental illness. The growing opioid epidemic continues to exacerbate the issue. Caring for the damaged and weak in our communities simply is the right thing to do and has permanent positive effects on the lives of everyone touched by those who overcome mental illness and dependency on drugs.

HOW DO WE FIX THIS?
Counties, the primary provider of criminal justice and jail operations, understand that this is complex and involves serious issues, but have reached a level of frustration over the inability to address illness in jails due to resource limits at the state level. Funding for state and federal human services programs has been on the decline for well over a decade while mandates have increased, with counties expected to assume larger roles without an increase in resources or support. State policy makers must stop adopting legislative proposals that harm our efforts or force a step backwards.

Effective strategies, supports and services must be provided to control the need for incarceration and reduce reentry into the criminal justice system. We must change the
perception of who is in jail and seek understanding of special populations and unique circumstances so that positive reform and proper return on investment of taxpayer dollars can take place. Long range strategies and policy issues must be developed to assist counties. Society must provide care and treatment as well as every possible tool to safely transition those with mental illness and substance abuse issues back into society in an effort to improve lives, use resources more effectively, enhance family structures and build safer communities.

For more information, see Comprehensive Behavioral Health headings at http://www.pacounties.org/GR/Pages/Priorities.aspx

SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA MESSAGING
(linked to your county’s website or related websites and articles)

County jails are the largest mental health facilities in the nation. Why should you care? Visit …

The wrong people are in jail. Why should you care? Visit …

The average cost of incarceration in a county jail is approximately $40,000 annually. There is a better way to use your tax dollars. Visit …

As many as 65% of Pa’s county jail inmates have a substance abuse disorder. Why does it matter to you? Visit …

10 to 30% of Pa’s jail inmates suffer from mental illness, and up to 14% have serious mental illness. It matters to your family. Find out why at …

COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR LEGISLATIVE DELEGATION

Some forms of communication are more effective than others. Aside from face-to-face visits, telephone calls, a personal email or letter are most effective.

Explain the issue as simply and straightforward as you can. Be sure to include the local impact - how this issue will affect your county, how much money it will cost local taxpayers, etc. Be prepared to provide the legislator with a bill number whenever possible.

Utilize your key county staff as a resource. If the issue you need to discuss impacts funding of county children and youth programs, consider taking your agency director with you to the meeting. These types of individuals can provide an important perspective as well as technical expertise.

Seize the opportunity to talk to staff as well as legislators. If a legislator is not available, do not decline an invitation to talk to a member of his or her staff.

Establish yourself as a resource on county issues. You are the expert on issues impacting your county. Offer to provide any assistance you are able to give your legislator(s) on any county issues that come before the General Assembly.

Meet with your legislator at home in the district. It is not always necessary to go to Harrisburg to visit your senator or representative. CCAP encourages participation in its
organized legislative workdays at the capitol, but visits in the local offices while the legislature is not in session are also effective. When the legislature is not in session, the legislator may be able to afford more time to meet locally than would be available at the capitol in the midst of voting sessions, committee meetings and caucus. Session dates can be found at the House and Senate webpages on the inside back cover.

**Emphasize the local connection.** You bring the local perspective to any issue, and have a shared constituency with your legislators. The well-being of those constituents is the greatest interest for you as a local elected official, as well as for the state legislator. Just like the private sector, public officials are increasingly more connected through electronic communication media, but a personal visit or a handwritten letter never go out of style as effective lobbying tools. When choosing your method, consider what you know about the legislator’s personal preferences, as well as the speed with which you need to get your message through. The next page includes a few medium-specific tips for communicating with your legislators.

**Consider a site visit and/or extended event.** Showcasing the services you offer can reinforce the impact a legislator’s vote on a particular bill or budget has on the county and local constituents. Consider hosting the event to begin early in the morning, with breakfast included. Once you have selected a date and time, send invitations to all House and Senate members from your county and invite them to bring staff. The invitation should include an agenda, or at least an outline of the events. If you can, limit the length of your event from one to two hours.

**Follow up with CCAP staff.** Fill out the legislative visit report online via the CCAP government relations page at [www.pacounties.org](http://www.pacounties.org) to reflect feedback that you receive from your legislators so that CCAP staff can follow up as needed.

**Visit Your Legislators.**
- Make an appointment
- Let them know what issues you want to discuss
- Prepare to state your position in 15 minutes or less
- Ascertain their position
- Bring materials to leave with them
- Follow up afterward

**Phone Your Legislators**
- Make notes before the call
- State the issue - be specific
- Explain your position using three of your most compelling arguments
- Ask for a position
- Follow up where needed
- If they do not call back, keep calling

**Email Your Legislators**
- Personalize it, but keep it brief
- Make sure they know it’s coming from a constituent
- State your position in the beginning
Write Your Legislators

• Include your return address in the body
• If you are a constituent, say so
• State your position in the first paragraph of the letter - be specific
• Say it in a page or less and ask for a response