

For the 2019 CCAP CJAB Best Practices Award, the Eastern County nomination is Bucks County CJAB.

For the past 14 years, the Bucks County CJAB has evolved into a flourishing, dedicated group of committed criminal justice and behavioral health leaders and partners. Their innovating programming and continued growth set them apart from many other CJABs.

Created on March 23, 2005, the Bucks County Board of Commissioners and the Bucks County Court of Common Pleas agreed to establish the CJAB with a mission to assist all county and municipal agencies in exploring and developing short term and long plans in order to facilitate the efficient delivery of public safety services to the citizens of Bucks County. In its fourteen years of operation, it has done just that.

The CJAB was originally under the leadership of former District Attorney David Heckler until he retired in 2016 and turned over the reins to the new District Attorney, Matthew Weintraub. In the years since Weintraub has been in charge of the CJAB, several new subcommittees have been created, based upon issues that have arisen in the criminal justice and behavioral health systems. Membership has also swelled to over 30 members who routinely attend and participate in active discussions during the CJAB quarterly meetings. The CJAB boasts of several members who are recognized at the state and federal level for their areas of expertise, making this a very powerful and motivated CJAB.

Recognizing the many criminal justice and behavioral health issues these systems were facing, and the constant strain on financial resources to effectively address both, the Bucks County CJAB developed its first strategic plan in 2012. In 2017, the CJAB formed a Strategic Planning Subcommittee to engage in a lengthy review of the original strategic plan. The group acknowledged the need for collaboration and operational respect for the fact that CJAB member agencies operate under different independent electoral and governmental mandates. With this in mind, the group strived to work collaboratively to provide the critically important services essential to maintaining the safe and orderly communities which Bucks Countians have historically enjoyed, a challenge easily met by this collaborative group.

In 2009, the CJAB supported the formation of a Central Booking Center program. To date, the Central Booking Center Subcommittee has a permanent place on quarterly CJAB meeting agendas, when information is shared about successes and challenges of the program, including a routine report-out of statistics regarding number of people processed and disbursements made from fees collected. These fees get funneled back into the Central Booking Processing program to cover operational fees. Currently, the CJAB is working on making the central booking center program run 24/7.

In 2010, the CJAB underwent its first Sequential Intercept Mapping process through the Center of Excellence. In 2015, the CJAB authorized a re-mapping of the county, allowing the group to update the narrative and the gaps and opportunities at each intercept, devise a new set of priorities, and develop an associated action plan. The Behavioral Health (now Human Services) Subcommittee was reinvigorated to keep the sequential mapping process alive and address other human service issues.

The Bucks County CJAB was the first county in the Commonwealth to sponsor a drug take-back program. The Bucks County Medication Give Back leads the Commonwealth in the volume of medications collected - since 2010, well over 100,000 pounds of unused medication have been collected. As of 2018, there are 34 permanent medication take back boxes throughout the county. The Bucks County Drug and Alcohol Commission provides access and training on Narcan for community members – on a regular basis, community members can come into a center, be trained on the use of Narcan and leave with a supply.

In addition to being a forerunner with programs such as central booking, drug take-back and Stepping Up, Bucks County is also a forerunner in pilot programs. As the result of the re-mapping process, the Human Services Subcommittee noted a particular gap in Intercept 2, which encompasses initial detention and first court appearance. In response, they created the Magisterial District Judge Mobile Engagement Pilot through a PCCD grant. A mobile crisis unit now responds to any of the twenty MDJ offices when an individual appears before the MDJ with behavioral health issues. The crisis unit does an assessment and triages the individual to several partner treatment providers, as well as provides follow-up. The mobile crisis unit has become an enormous success within the county.

The District Court Diversionary Program (“DCDP”) was created in 2018 to provide immediate treatment to participants by removing barriers, such as funding and transportation, while saving the justice system money. In this program, Magisterial District Judges refer those charged with specified misdemeanor drug offenses to the Office of the District Attorney for possible diversion for treatment. Participants’ eligibility is determined based on their prior records. Participants accepted into the program are required to have an immediate drug and alcohol assessment and abide by any recommendations, progress is monitored, and cases are continued for 90 days to 6 months to ensure compliance with treatment. Upon successful completion of mandated conditions, the criminal charges will be dismissed by the Magisterial District Judge. Some participants may be eligible for expungement. Participants who fail to complete the program will proceed through the normal criminal case process in the Court of Common Pleas.

While the CJAB has supported programs aimed at reducing the impact of drug addiction in the community, such as the Narcan community disbursement, drug take-back and MDJ mobile unit programming, it also recognized a need to use law enforcement to assist in these measures. The CJAB has supported the Bensalem Police Assisting in Recovery program (BPAIR), an active program aimed at helping people deal with opioid and other drug addictions by connecting them to a treatment provider. With this program, people struggling with drug addiction can walk into the police department without fear of arrest, and request assistance from officers who are trained to reach out to treatment providers on their behalf.

In response to school safety concerns and recent legislature, the CJAB supported the creation of a School Safety committee with membership ranging from the criminal justice to the school systems. The committee is developing local Threat Assessment teams within the community. The county also participates in the Safe2Say program, allowing concerns about a troubled child to be shared with the school system in order to provide intervention and support.

Bucks County is unique in that it lacks an urban municipality, yet it suffers from the same types of criminal justice and behavioral health issues as are seen in neighboring Philadelphia to the southwest and Trenton, New Jersey to the northeast. Despite this, the county leans heavily on the resident experts who comprise the CJAB, many of whom are inspirational leaders in their fields, as well as their strong sense of collaboration and dedication to create a seamlessly strong partnership between the criminal justice and behavioral health systems. CJAB Chair Matthew Weintraub is perhaps one of the most influential, collaborative and inclusive CJAB leaders in the Eastern Region, providing a forum where each member has a voice and is respected for their views. As a result of the thriving membership, dedication of members and excellent leadership, the Bucks County CJAB has enjoyed much success in ensuring the effective delivery of public safety services to the residents of Bucks County.

Therefore, I hereby nominate the Bucks County CJAB to receive the CCAP Best Practices Award for 2019.