

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/new-vera-study-highlights-the-mental-health-needs-of-people-arrested-in-dc>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

On July 26, Veras [Substance Use and Mental Health Program \(SUMH\)](#) published a new report on the mental health needs of people arrested in the District of Columbia.

The [report](#), *Closing the Gap: Using Criminal Justice and Public Health Data to Improve the Identification of Mental Illness*, contains the findings of a two-year SUMH research project. Using an unprecedented combined dataset from four criminal justice agencies and the DC Department of Mental Health on people arrested in DC during June 2008, Veras researchers found that the agencies often miss opportunities for identifying mental-health needs of people involved in the criminal justice system. This study contributes to ongoing initiatives in the District to improve services for this population.

Agencies could enhance the identification of people who require mental health services by improving inter-agency communication about the needs of their shared clients. However, legal regulations, ethical considerations, and cultural factors all act as barriers to collaboration, limiting information sharing between the agencies. As a result, this vulnerable population often goes without much-needed treatment as it cycles through interactions with the police, pretrial services, the courts, jail or prison, parole, and probation.

Based upon its findings, the researchers recommended a number of changes in practice that would help the relevant justice and mental health agencies capitalize on opportunities to identify those involved in the DC criminal justice system who may benefit from mental health services and ensure continuity of treatment for people with mental health needs as they move between settings.

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