

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/publications/behavioral-health-dc-justice-health-systems>

Policy Issue Resources

Publication

People with mental health and substance use problems are overrepresented at all stages of the criminal justice system in the United States. However, decision makers, health care providers, and staff often work with only a fraction of the behavioral health information that exists about their clients. Expanding the availability of behavioral health data could improve prevention, early intervention, and continuity of care at every stage in the system. It also has the potential to keep people out of jail and prison by appropriately diverting them to treatment in the community.

There is growing interest in how to share data across sectors and agencies, but few examples. In this study, Vera researchers worked with six government agencies in the District of Columbia to study the availability and location of behavioral health information held for a cohort of people who were arrested in October 2012.

Behavioral health information was generated widely throughout the justice and health systems and the majority of the arrest cohort had pre-existing information relating to mental health and substance use issues. Expanding access to this data could greatly inform agency decisions.

Protecting peoples behavioral health data is paramount. Vera developed a methodology that complied with stringent data protection statutes to match data across agencies.

The justice agencies generated follow-up behavioral health information during contact for a minority of people who arrived with historical information.

Historical behavioral health information could potentially be retrieved from each agencies own archives for some of these clients.

PUBLICATION

NEWS

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