

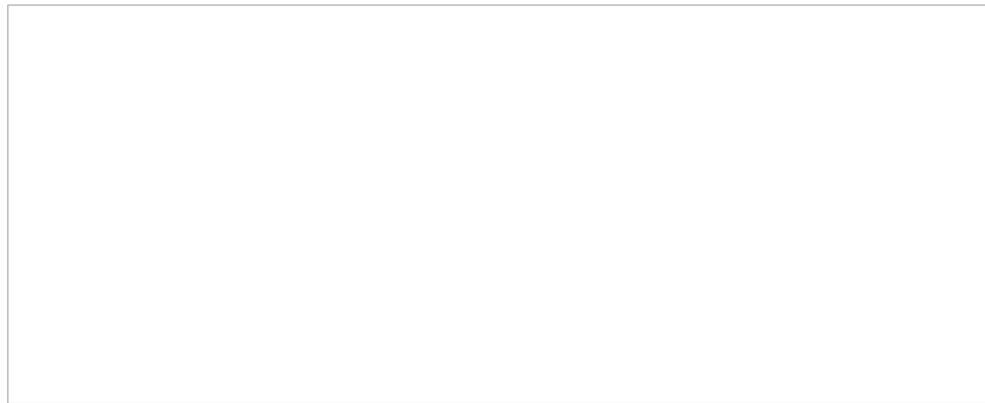
Ohio Justice and Policy Center

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://ohiojpc.org/2018/05/10/mental-health-incarceration-intertwined/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

by [Marais Jacon-Duffy](#) | May 10, 2018 | [Blog](#), [Death Penalty](#)



As we at OJPC work in prisons and with incarcerated people, we are constantly confronted with the shortcomings of our country's mental healthcare systems.

[The U.S. Department of Justice](#) says that, on average, one in seven people in prisons and one in three people in jails across the country has a serious mental illness. In addition, the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) says more than 83 percent of people who are incarcerated and have mental illnesses are not being properly treated.

Obviously, a prison or jail is not a conducive environment for mental wellness and healing. Incarceration is incredibly traumatic for most people, let alone people who already struggle with mental illnesses.

Jailing people with mental illness creates huge burdens on law enforcement, corrections and state and local budgets, NAMI said on its website. It does not protect public safety. And people who could be helped are being ignored.

One report by [The Atlantic](#) aptly described how mental illnesses can lead directly to specific crimes. Officials emphasized that the overwhelming majority were crimes of survival such as retail theft (to find food or supplies) or breaking and entering (to find a place to sleep), the story said. For those with mental illness, charges of drug possession can often indicate attempts at self-medication.

The intersections of mental illness and addiction have solidified their roots in the criminal justice system. If addiction was treated as a disease by mental health professionals, the population of people cycling through our jails and prisons would likely decrease dramatically.

Today, the U.S. prison system is the largest mental healthcare provider in the country. In fact, [the Cook County Jail in Chicago](#) houses some 400,000 people with mental illnesses, which makes the jail the largest mental hospital in the country.

This month, we will continue to highlight how mental health and criminal justice are linked.

We also want to bring our free legal clinics to populations with mental health struggles of their own. This month, we've partnered with the Center for Addiction Treatment on May 15 from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. This clinic is open only to CAT staff as well as former and current clients.

We're also hosting a free legal clinic at the VA Medical Center on Vine Street on May 21 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

In the meantime, here are several studies and reports for further reading on the connection between mental health and criminal justice.

[Prisons and jails are not a mental health system](#) | The Philadelphia Inquirer

[America's Largest Mental Hospital Is a Jail](#) | The Atlantic

[Why We Shouldn't Stigmatize Mentally Ill Prisoners](#) | Time

[Jailing People With Mental Illness](#) | NAMI

Register for one of OJPC's virtual legal clinics [here](#).

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