



**SALLY  
HERNANDEZ  
FOR SHERIFF**

**A working comprehensive draft plan to serve  
individuals suffering from mental illness in the  
criminal justice system**

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## **Mental Health Services**

*“The need for proactive treatment of individuals suffering with mental illness in Travis County continues to grow. In 2011, there were 4,200 individuals flagged at the Travis County Jail as possibly having a mental health need. In 2014, that number increased to over 6,000. Effective policing must include partnerships with mental health services to intercept and divert those suffering from mental illness and help them find medical treatment outside of the jail system.” - Constable*

*Sally Hernandez*

## **Mental Health Challenges**

First, the biggest challenge that mental health services will encounter is funding. Currently, MCOT cannot make every call even as its budget and workforce has increased. Indeed, after the 1115 Wavier is phased out (See “What is the relationship between the Travis County Sheriff and MCOT?” below), Travis County will need to find an additional \$1.8 million dollars to sustain MCOT.<sup>1</sup> Travis County needs a Sheriff that will encourage the members of the Legislature to significantly increase the current level of fund for MHMR and mental health services.

Another challenge is helping individuals find affordable housing options near bus routes, services, and businesses, such as grocery stores, that are needed in order to successfully re-enter into society. According to the Austin American Statesman, veterans, some of which are affected by a mental illness and end up in County Jail, is a group that is in most need of affordable housing.<sup>2</sup> Currently, Mayor Adler and the City of Austin City Council are working to solve this issue.

Other challenges include helping individuals find affordable and stable medical services once they are released from jail. When an individual is put into Travis County Jail, their Medicare and Medicaid get shut off. When an individual is released from jail, currently, there is no system in place that turns their medical services back so that they can continue to receive the medicine they require. We need a Sheriff that will help turn back on Medicare and Medicaid.

Finally, we must help end the stigma. “[S]tudies indicated that individuals with mental illness are no more violent than the general populations. Individuals with mental illness are more likely to be victims of violent crime than perpetrators of it.”<sup>3</sup> We must cultivate an “environments in which individuals, families and friends feel confident in speaking up when their loved ones are in distress and need help.”<sup>4</sup>

## **Spring 2015 Behavioral Health Advisory Committee Report**

The Spring 2015 Behavioral Health Advisory Report (“Report”) is the second of two reports released by the Behavioral Health Advisory Committee. The Committee, which

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<sup>1</sup> Jazmine Ulloa, *Reports looks at gaps in mental health services for criminal defendants*, AUSTIN AMERICAN-STATESMAN, May 3, 2015, <http://www.mystatesman.com/news/news/crime-law/report-looks-at-gaps-in-mental-health-services-for/nk8GJ/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> Greg Hansch and Karen Ranus, *Stop Scapegoating the Mentally Ill*, NAMI AUSTIN, Jul. 31, 2015, <http://www.namiaustin.org/2015/07/stop-scapegoating-the-mentally-ill/>.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

was co-founded and lead by Judge Hohengarten is comprised of 70 law enforcement, social service, and mental health representatives from Travis County.<sup>5</sup>

The Report detailed five different intercept points, known as the Sequential Intercept Model, in the Travis County criminal justice system in which over fifty facilities and programs could assist in diverting individuals with a mental health illness from the criminal justice system.

### **What is the Sequential Intercept Model?**

The Sequential Intercept Model details five intercept points which provide opportunities to divert an individual from advancing further into the criminal justice system, and helps the Travis County Sheriff's Office and the Travis County community understand how individuals interact with the criminal justice system. More importantly, the Sequential Intercept Model helps law enforcement and communities identify opportunities and determine where there is a need and gaps in health services for those determined to be mentally ill.<sup>6</sup>

The five intercept points are:

Intercept 1: Law Enforcement/Emergency Services

Intercept 2: Initial Detention/Initial Court Hearings

Intercept 3: Jails/Courts

Intercept 4: Re-Entry

Intercept 5: Community Corrections/Community Support.

You can find a table of the Travis County Sequential Intercept Model by clicking [here](#).

### **What is Austin Travis County Integral Care (ATCIC)?**

ATCIC was founded in 1967 and provides community based mental health services. ATCIC is accredited by the Joint Commission and focuses on four major areas: (1) Adult Behavioral Health, (2) Child and Family, (3) Intellectual and Development Disabilities, and (4) Psychiatric Crisis Services and Jail Diversion.<sup>7</sup> ATCIC provides, among many other services, psychiatric evaluations, crisis interventions, medical treatment, and residential services.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> *The Sequential Intercept Model*, NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS, no date, <http://www2.nami.org/Template.cfm?Section=CIT&Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=79159>.

<sup>7</sup> *Narrative*, AUSTIN TRAVIS COUNTY INTEGRAL CARE, no date, <http://www.integralcare.org/content/narrative>.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

ATCIC was awarded the National Council for Behavioral Health’s Community Impact Award for Mental Health First Aid. Previously, ATCIC was known as the Austin Travis County Mental Health Mental Retardation Center until it named was changes in 2009 in order to “reflect evolving attitudes and terminology and to honor the dignity of people who seek [their] services.”<sup>9</sup>

### **What is the relationship between the Travis County Sheriff’s Office and ATCIC?**

In April of this year, Travis County announced an effort to connect inmates with health and social services in order to help ensure a successful reentry into the community. As part of this effort, ATCIC will be spending the rest of this year “developing a plan to bridge the gap between when inmates are released and when they are able to access community services.”<sup>10</sup>

### **What is the Mobile Crisis Outreach Team (MCOT)?**

MCOT helps divert people from the criminal justice system by providing assessments and interventions when necessary. Intervention takes the form of providing medication, resources, or other alternatives to an individual suffering from a mental health illness.<sup>11</sup>

MCOT co-responds with the Travis County Sheriff’s Office to those in crisis. MCOT is comprised of medical and mental health professionals such as registered nurses and clinicians, who respond to a mental health crisis on-site.<sup>12</sup> Once MCOT is at the scene of a crisis, “MCOT can assume responsibility for an individual’s care. The result is that individuals experiencing a mental health crisis receive the care they need quicker and are diverted from jail and emergency rooms. This allows first responders to return to the work they are best suited for – addressing medical crises or public safety matters. In the first year of the expansion, MCOT diverted an estimated 82% of individuals from hospital emergency rooms and jails.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> Clara O’Rourke, *Travis County plans changes to help mentally ill inmates get care*, AUSTIN AMERICAN-STATESMAN, Apr. 1, 2015, [http://www.mystatesman.com/news/news/crime-law/travis-county-plans-changes-to-help-mentally-ill-i/nkkTm/?icmp=statesman\\_internallink\\_textlink\\_apr2013\\_statesmanstubtomystatesman\\_launch#c838d0d9.3708363.735719](http://www.mystatesman.com/news/news/crime-law/travis-county-plans-changes-to-help-mentally-ill-i/nkkTm/?icmp=statesman_internallink_textlink_apr2013_statesmanstubtomystatesman_launch#c838d0d9.3708363.735719).

<sup>11</sup> *Mobile Crisis Outreach Team (MCOT)*, AUSTIN TRAVIS COUNTY INTEGRAL CARE, no date, <http://www.integralcare.org/content/mobile-crisis-outreach-team-mcot>.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> Carol Collins, *New Innovations in Mobile Crisis Outreach in Travis County*, AUSTIN TRAVIS COUNTY INTEGRAL CARE, Apr. 17, 2015, <http://leadershipaustin.org/2015/04/17/new-innovations-in-mobile-crisis-outreach-in-travis-county/>.

## **What is the Relationship Between the Travis County Sheriff and MCOT?**

In 2011, ATCIC applied for a 1115 Medicaid Transformation Waiver, which improves health outcomes and reduces the cost of care. The 1115 Waiver allowed MCOT to expand and to partner with the Travis County Sheriff's Office to co-respond to a crisis. The successful implementation of programs implemented through the 1115 Waiver allows our community to receive \$1.40 in federal money for every dollar we invest.

## **Austin State Hospital**

Austin State Hospital ("ASH") is part of a State Hospital system that includes eight other sister hospitals and one youth center.<sup>14</sup> The Austin State Hospital provide three main services—Adult Psychiatric Services, Specialty Adult Services, and Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Services.<sup>15</sup> "Clinical specialties provide assessment, evaluation, and treatment, including psychiatry, nursing, social work, psychology, education/rehabilitation services, nutrition, and spiritual care."<sup>16</sup> ASH's values include respect, honesty, integrity, compassion, commitment, trust, patience, courage, and honor, among many other.<sup>17</sup>

ASH serves 38 counties, an additional 33 counties for children, 122 Local Mental Health Authorities, and has 299 funded beds.<sup>18</sup> ASH admitted 2,530 patients during fiscal year 2014 and the average stay was 26 days.<sup>19</sup>

## **Support services for those affected by mental illness**

Mental illness does not only affect an individual. Mental illness also affect families, children, parents, and friends. There are currently organization in Travis County that provide support group services to families, friends, and parents.

Additionally, mental health service organization in Travis County are able to provide mental health awareness and recognition programs for inmates and deputies.

## **My Plan to Bridge the Mental Health Services Gap in Travis County:**

- Work towards implementing recommendations from the Behavioral Health Advisory Committee Spring 2015 Report and take a proactive role in assisting

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<sup>14</sup> *Welcome to Austin State Hospital*, AUSTIN STATE HOSPITAL, no date.

<sup>15</sup> *Welcome to Austin State Hospital - Over 150 Years of Continued Excellence*, Texas Department of State Health Services, Nov. 13, 2013, <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/mhhospitals/austinsh/>.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> *Welcome to Austin State Hospital*.

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

the Committee in its continued efforts to address mental health needs in Travis County.

- Continue efforts to implement the Sequential Intercept Model and take a proactive role to partner with organizations to find opportunities to divert people who should be diverted at each point in the model.
- Work to secure funding for programs like the Mobile Crisis Outreach Teams and other mental health intervention and community re-entry programs.
- Encourage the members of the Legislature to significantly increase the current level of fund for MHMR and mental health services.
- Provide support to partner agencies and community organizations so that they may secure funding.
- Connect mentally ill inmates to Medicaid and health care resources as a part of their re-entry process so that they may access needed services and medical care.
- Provide advance levels of CIT training as part of continuing education programs and partner with mental health service providers for these trainings.
- Implement appropriate mental health screenings and ensure that the proper individuals are notified within a timely manner if a person is flagged.
- Implement best practices for suicide prevention.
- Identify resources and changes needed for individuals who should not be diverted and are in jail to better assist with mental health needs.
- Work with community organizations, leaders, and advocacy groups to:
  - ▶ Disseminate information about substance abuse treatment programs;
  - ▶ Connect with family and peer support groups;
  - ▶ Identify affordable/alternative housing;
  - ▶ Provide support to assure successful re-entry; and
  - ▶ Increase awareness and understanding.
- Work with the City of Austin and/or Travis County to create a registry for transitional housing providers who can provide housing at a small fee. Input from transitional housing providers will be sought.