



## For Immediate Release

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### ***Stepping Up for Change: Kern County Tackles Mental Illness in Community and Jail***

**Bakersfield, Kern County, California, March 29, 2016 --** Key agency administrators, staff, and consumer advocates in mental health, substance abuse, and criminal justice in Kern County participated in a 1.5 day *Sequential Intercept Mapping* workshop for the development of integrated strategies to identify and respond effectively to the needs of justice-involved individuals with co-occurring mental and substance use disorders by reducing system and service barriers. This Sequential Intercept Map will be utilized by the Mental Health Department and the Community Corrections Partnership (CCP) in current and future service development and networking.

*Sequential Intercept Mapping*, facilitated by Policy Research Associates (“PRA”) in Delmar, New York, is a workshop designed to help communities identify existing community resources, service gaps, and opportunities for improved service coordination and communication between mental health, substance use disorder, and criminal justice professionals.

Key community agencies and organizations were invited by Supervisor Mick Gleason, Judge Susan M. Gill, Sheriff Donny Youngblood, Bakersfield Police Chief Greg Williamson, Probation Chief TR Merickel, National Alliance on Mental Illness – Kern County President Marie Neel, and Kern County Mental Health Director Bill Walker to participate in the SIM Workshop. During the workshop, participants developed a map detailing the flow of criminal justice contact from arrest to incarceration, referral and access to services, and points for diversion from the justice system across Kern County. Strategies for systems change implemented by other U.S. communities were considered.

Nationally, individuals with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders are an increasing presence within the criminal justice system. Studies have shown that 6.4% of men and 12.2% of women entering U.S. jails have a severe and persistent mental illness, compared to less than 2% of the general population. Of these individuals, 72% have a co-occurring substance use disorder. This problem is especially pronounced in rural communities, where the availability, accessibility, and acceptability of behavioral health services prevent many from receiving the help that they need. With more than 650,000 individuals returning to communities each year from prisons and 7,000,000 individuals returning from jails, effective linkage and access to community services for people with mental illness and co-occurring substance use disorder is critical to reduce an often repetitious cycle of justice involvement.

**For more information on Kern County’s Action Plan contact Cindy Coe. Information on the workshop is available at [www.prainc.com](http://www.prainc.com) or [training@prainc.com](mailto:training@prainc.com)**