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**Criminal Justice Coordinating Council Members: Tips for Supporting the Local Behavioral Health Service Continuum**

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## **PUBLIC DEFENDERS**

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Public defenders often have first-hand knowledge of the challenges faced by people with behavioral health problems who come in contact with the criminal justice system. Joining this with a deep understanding of the rights of individuals going through the justice system, the Public Defender's perspective can help shape meaningful improvements in the local behavioral health service continuum.

### **Explore Avenues for Diversion**

- *Support use* of an evidence-based, validated risk assessment to prevent clients who are at low or moderate risk of noncompliance from being incarcerated unnecessarily.
- *Partner with behavioral health professionals* in the legal defense to help address underlying behavioral health issues that contribute to clients' contact with the justice system, including:
  - Clinicians to evaluate mental health and substance use disorders
  - Social workers to provide support with housing, treatment, and/or employment
- *Develop agreements* for the assessment of clients for mental illness or co-occurring disorders during the pretrial phase of their cases (to safely guide the use of that information while ensuring clients receive the services they need).
- *Advocate for diversion* to mental health or substance use treatment, where appropriate.

### **Partner with Stakeholders**

- *Coordinate* with criminal justice and behavioral health professionals and family/consumer advocates to enhance the effectiveness of diversion programs.
- *Partner* with behavioral health providers on funding opportunities to integrate case management and behavioral health services into public defense teams.
- *Lend expertise* to community initiatives on improving criminal justice outcomes.
- *Participate* in the local Criminal Justice Coordinating Council and/or subcommittee focused on behavioral health issues to develop innovative solutions to community needs, including:
  - Identifying opportunities for diversion from the criminal justice system to treatment where appropriate
  - Identifying gaps and opportunities in the local behavioral health service continuum

### **Advocate for Systems Change**

- *Build consensus* around identifying gaps in behavioral health services by meeting with community leaders or holding community listening sessions.
- *Leverage knowledge* of the legal system and gaps in the behavioral health services continuum to communicate areas of need to stakeholders.
- *Use traditional and new media* (newspapers, televised interviews, and social media) to communicate the need and support for behavioral health services and interventions.
- *Educate leaders and the community* on potential or existing civil rights issues related to the incarceration of people with mental illness or co-occurring disorders.