

# UNDERSTANDING THE POPULATION OF PEOPLE WITH FREQUENT JAIL CONTACT

Findings from a Multi-Site, Mixed-Methods Project

September 29, 2023



Supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

# Welcome/Tech Overview

- General Overview
  - Zoom features
  - *Please chat your questions*
- The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Safety and Justice Challenge

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# Acknowledgement

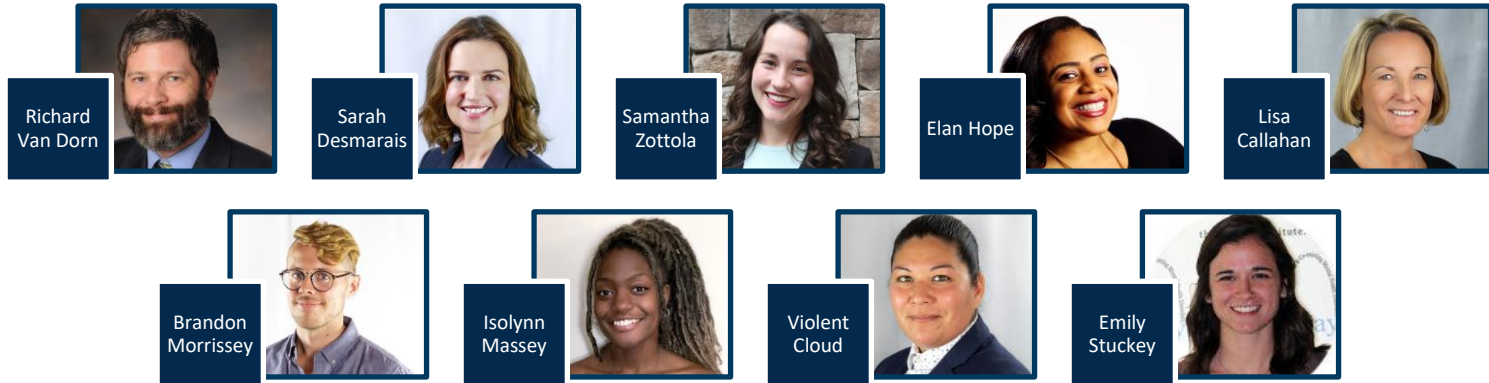
- This research was supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation through the Safety and Justice Challenge Research Consortium, which is managed by the CUNY Institute for State and Local Governance.
- The authors are solely responsible for the content of this presentation.

# Outline

- Overview
- Methods
- Project Sites
- Findings
- Policy Recommendations

# OVERVIEW

# PRA Research Team



# 3 Overarching Research Goals

1. Describe the population of people with frequent jail contact
  - Focus on intersecting needs and systemic barriers that lead to repeated jail admissions
2. Identify strategies used to reduce returns to jail
  - Focus on collaboration with community-based service providers
3. Assess outcomes associated with these strategies
  - Focus on behavioral health and racial/ethnic inequities



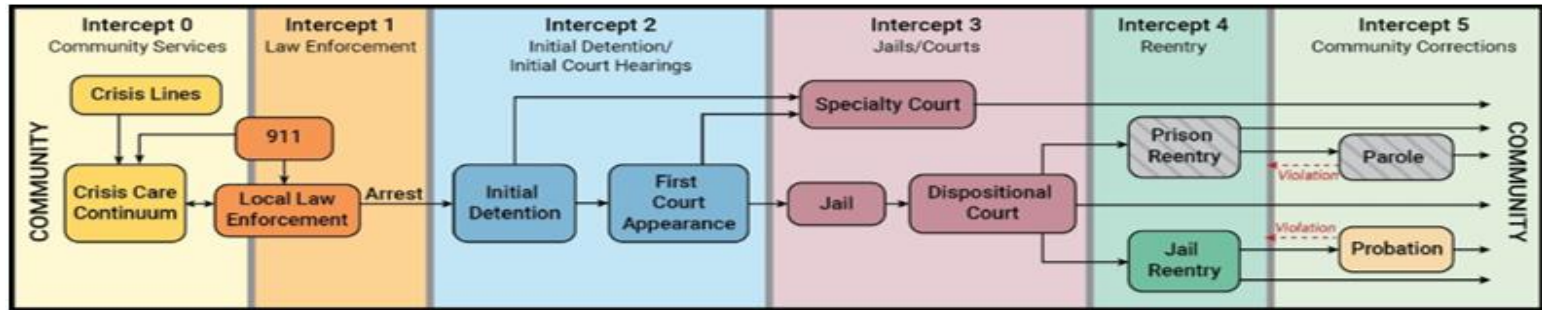
# METHODS

# Methods

- Quantitative Methods
  - At least 6 years of jail and behavioral health administrative data
  - Analyses
    - Objective 1: Describe the population
    - Objective 3: Assess outcomes
- Qualitative methods
  - 50 interviews (27 practitioners, 23 people with lived experience)
  - Analyses
    - Objectives 1-3

# Organizing Framework

- Sequential Intercept Model (SIM)
  - Identifies intercepts in pathways in and out of the criminal legal system among people with frequent jail contact (Abreu et al., 2017)



# PROJECT SITES

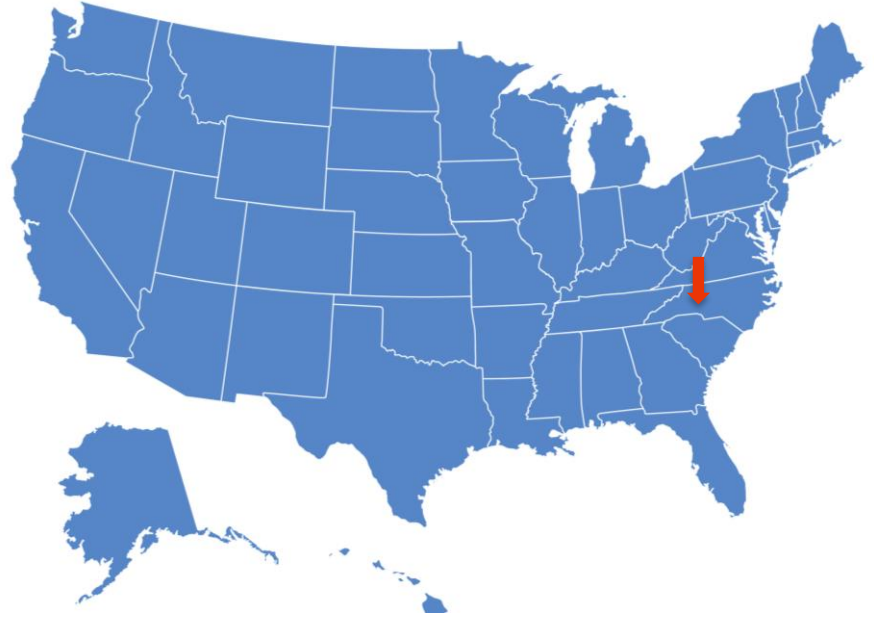
# 3 Project Sites

- Mecklenburg County, North Carolina
- Harris County, Texas
- Pennington County, South Dakota

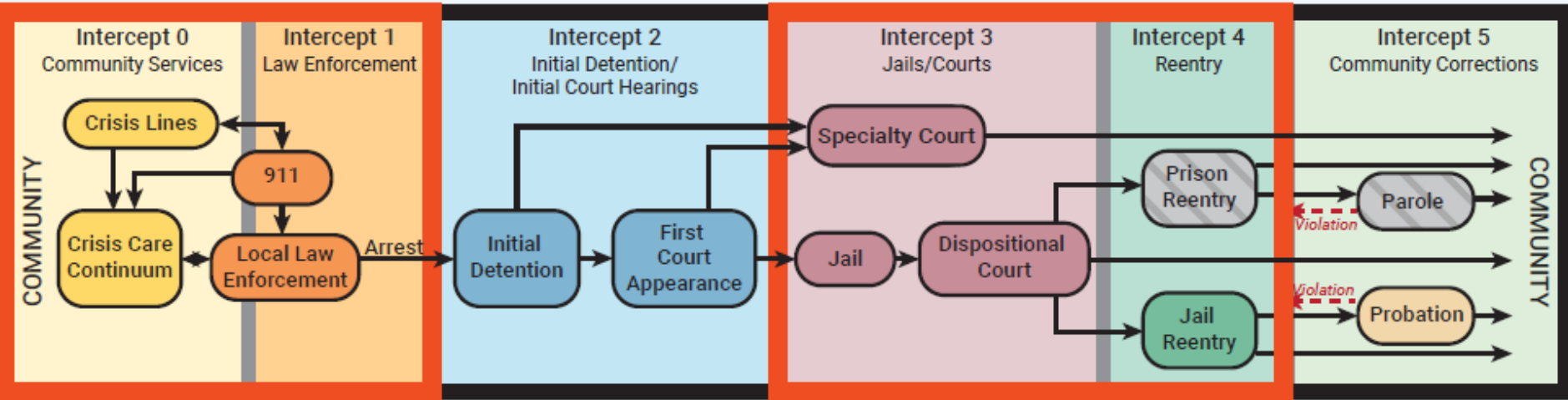
# Mecklenburg County Site Lead

Dr. Stephen Strzelecki

Clinical Director,  
Forensic Evaluations Unit



# Mecklenburg County Focus

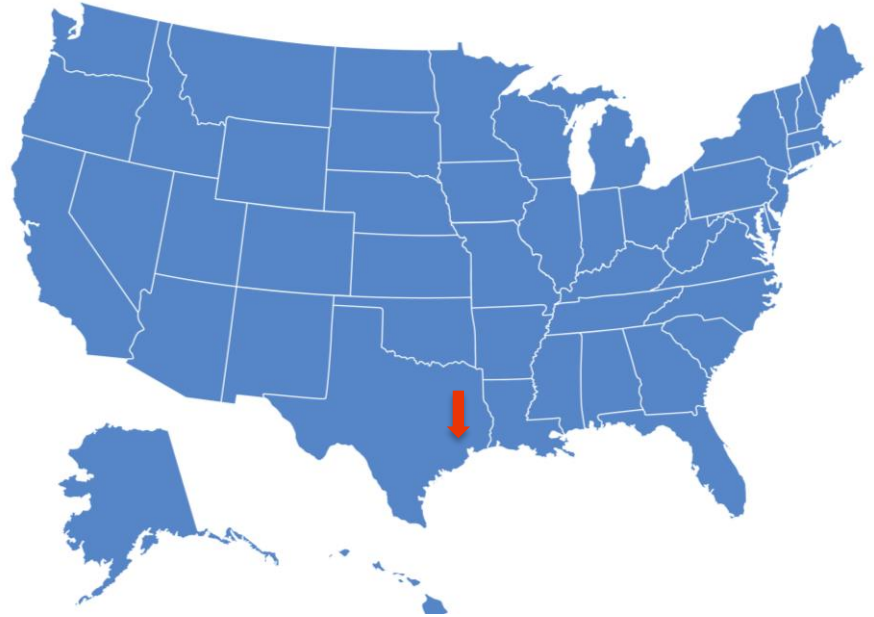


Abreu, D., Parker, T. W., Noether, C. D., Steadman, H. J., & Case, B. (2017). Revising the paradigm for jail diversion for people with mental and substance use disorders: Intercept 0. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 35(5-6), 380-395. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.2300>  
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# Harris County Site Lead

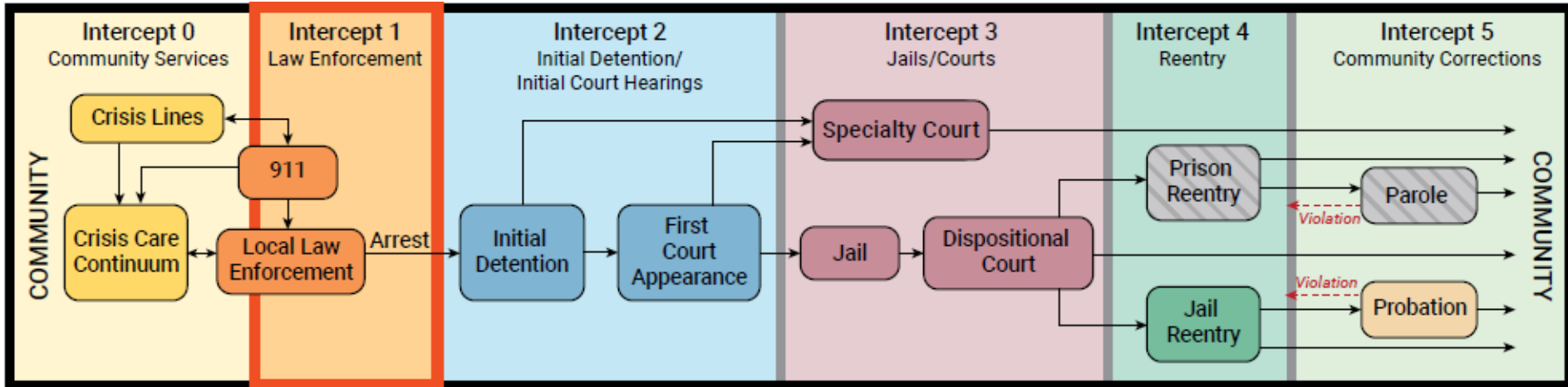
Wayne Young

Chief Executive Officer,  
The Harris Center for Mental  
Health and IDD





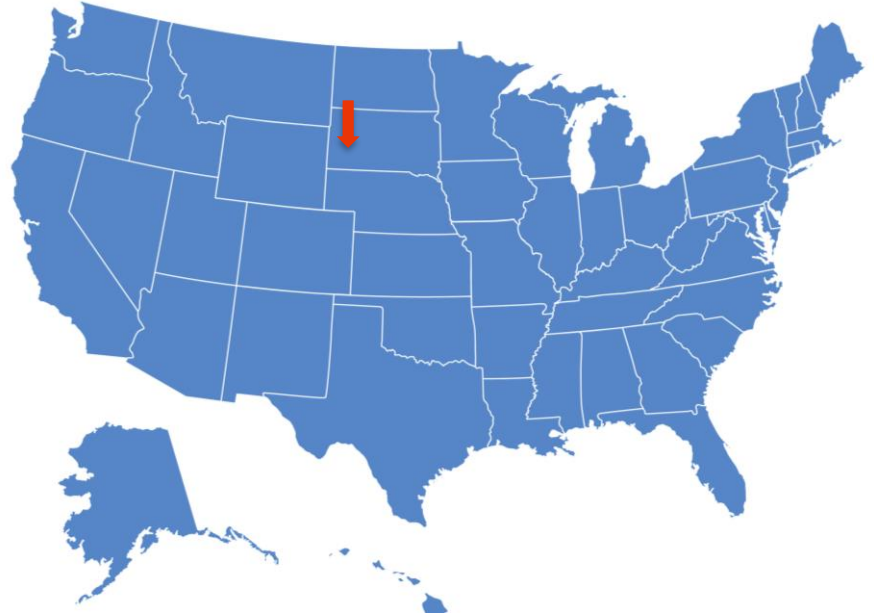
# Harris County Focus



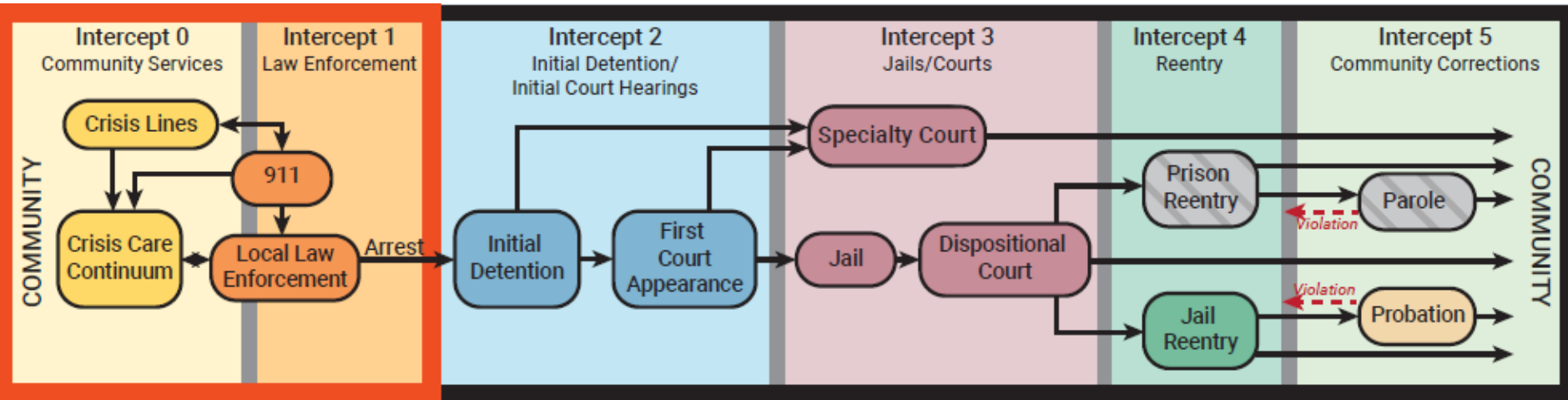
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# Pennington County Site Lead

Liz Hassett  
Grant Manager,  
Pennington County



# Pennington County Focus



Abreu, D., Parker, T. W., Noether, C. D., Steadman, H. J., & Case, B. (2017). Revising the paradigm for jail diversion for people with mental and substance use disorders: Intercept 0. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 35(5-6), 380-395. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.2300>  
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# FINDINGS

Answering the 10 RFWP Research Questions

# Research Question 1:

## *How is frequent jail contact defined?*

- Typically, not defined by sites
  - Face and name recognition

# Lack of Definition

Really, now that we've been doing this for a while staff are pre-trained to eyeball [clients] so when they come in [staff] are like, 'Johnny's back. This is the second time this month.'

# Research Question 1:

## *How is frequent jail contact defined?*

- Typically, not defined by sites
  - Face and name recognition
- Some agencies have lists of people with top # of contacts
- Median # of bookings among people with >1 booking
  - Ranged from 3 to 4 across sites

## Research Question 2:

### *What proportion of jail population?*

- Majority (half to two-thirds) of bookings
- Minority (one-fifth to one-quarter) of people booked
- Rates  $\geq$  other studies



# Research Question 3:

## *What characteristics describe the population?*

- Predominantly men and people of color
- Mental health needs higher rates than general population
  - But, not necessarily characteristic of population
- Perceived high rates of:
  - Chronic homelessness
  - Trauma

# Interconnected Needs

I think they're caught in alcohol or drug problems, houselessness, and mental health problems. So, our frequent utilizers are going to have a combination of all of those things.

# Research Question 4:

## *What are pathways to jail?*

- Two pathways described
  - Low-level offenses directly tie to lack of housing
  - Low-level offenses related to unmet behavioral health needs

# Frequent Arrests for Low Level Offenses

...a rap sheet that's 100 pages long... and it's literally just, you know, disorderly conduct, disorderly conduct, disorderly conduct

# Research Question 4:

## *What are pathways to jail?*

- Two pathways described
  - Low-level offenses directly tie to lack of housing
  - Low-level offenses related to unmet behavioral health needs

*But, quantitative data found often higher level of charges.*

## Research Question 5:

### *What strategies have sites implemented?*

- No site implemented programs exclusively for people with frequent jail contact

# Strategies for People with Frequent Contact

When you go to categorize high utilizers, there's some that are inherently going to be jail facility high utilizers due to ... their background or ... they have a warrant... and then there's the high utilizers of [our services] which [includes] three different programs ... crisis care, safe solutions, and detox. So really, when I think about high utilizers ... it's kind of hard to say that they only use one area.

## Research Question 5:

### *What strategies have sites implemented?*

- No site implemented strategies specifically for people with frequent jail contact
- Some collaboration across systems and agencies
- Strategies that support diversion and community-based alternatives to jail
  - Criteria differed across sites



# Research Question 6:

## *Who are strategies reaching?*

- Inconsistent identification of behavioral health needs
  - Over time within people
  - Potential racial bias

# Difficulty Accessing Mental Health Services

Many [people with frequent jail contact] don't see mental health service, I know myself at one time, it was pushed under the rug, you know? So, I'm able to talk to them about that...

# Research Question 6:

## *Who are strategies reaching?*

- Inconsistent identification of behavioral health needs
  - Over time within people
  - Potential racial bias
- Reach of diversion services
  - People with mental health needs
  - White people and people of color
  - Men and women
  - Not necessarily people with frequent jail contact

# Lack of Housing Impacts Services

[Lack of] housing causes disruptions, whether that be, because they lose their medication ... or something else. A lot of times it's not just simply [that people] stop taking their medications. [It] is usually a whole lot of other factors ... So, on paper, it looks like a lot of bad noncompliance, but when you really get to it, it's more like housing instability.

# Research Question 7:

## *How do sites define success?*

- Typically, not defined by sites
- When discussed, focus on service delivery
  - How well received
  - How widespread
- Emphasis on:
  - Challenges
  - People with whom they currently work

# Research Question 8:

## *What are site-level outcomes?*

- Reductions in jail bookings across sites

# Research Question 8:

## *What are site-level outcomes?*

- Reductions in jail bookings across sites
- But...
  - No change in booking rates for some
    - Example: people with mental health needs
  - Increase in booking rates for others
    - Example: felony charges

# Research Question 9:

## *What are individual-level outcomes?*

- Decreases in average number of bookings\*
- Some changes in average length of stay
  - Increases for some
  - Decreases for others\*

*\*But, likely reflect limited follow-up period*



# Research Question 10:

## *Are outcomes distributed equitably?*

- No
- Overrepresentation of people with frequent contact
  - Overall and people with frequent jail contact
- Racial disparities persist in outcomes
  - Potential exacerbation

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

# Policy Recommendations

1. Create a data sharing ecosystem
2. Establish formal, jurisdiction-specific definitions
3. Use validated screening tools
4. Implement psychiatric advance directives
5. Facilitate jail in-reach programs
6. Increase peer support programs
7. Improve access to housing
8. Increase utilization of community-based services
9. Center and evaluate efforts for racial equity

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO REDUCE FREQUENT JAIL CONTACT

### Policy Brief

Prepared by: Sarah L. Desmarais, Brandon Morrissey, Lisa Callahan, Samantha A. Zottola, Jen Elder, Kristin Lupfer, Elan C. Hope, & Richard A. Van Dorn

MAY 2023

Although most jail admissions represent the only contact a person will have with the criminal legal system, there is a small group of people who experience more frequent jail contact and who represent a disproportionate number of both jail admissions and expenditures.<sup>1,2</sup> People with frequent jail contact experience complex, interconnected social, economic, and behavioral health needs that may exacerbate (or be exacerbated by) their frequent jail contact. This group also experiences frequent contact with other services in the community, such as emergency rooms, homeless shelters, and treatment facilities. Strategies to implement services that meet complex needs and address structural barriers are critical to meaningfully and sustainably reduce system involvement among the population of people who experience frequent jail contact.

Effective change for people with frequent jail contact must proceed simultaneously on a systemic, policy level and on the individual

services level. The population discussed in this policy brief typically has complicated behavioral and medical health needs, extensive criminal legal encounters, and significant social deficits such as poverty, isolation, and elevated risk of being unsheltered. Many of their needs can be addressed with intensive, person-centered treatment in a coordinated continuum of care. The success of community-based solutions is supported by three foundational elements:

1. A systemwide examination of structural barriers and opportunities,
2. A focus on policies to effectively implement and support evidence-based interventions, and
3. A re-envisioning of how the behavioral health and criminal legal systems can coordinate trauma-informed responses for people with frequent jail contact.

<sup>1</sup> Elsa Augustine and Evan White, *High Utilizers of Multiple Systems in Spokane County* (2020), <https://www.cspolicylab.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/High-Utilizers-of-Multiple-Systems-in-Spokane-County.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Ross MacDonald, Felicia Kaba, Zachary Roemer, Allison Vise, David Weiss, Molly Skerker, Nathaniel Diskay, and Homer Venters, *The Rikers Island Hot Spotters: Defining the Needs of the Most Frequently Incarcerated*, *105 AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC HEALTH* 2262-2268 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.2195/ajph.2015.302785>



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# 1. Create a Data Sharing Ecosystem

- Common data-sharing language and platform
  - Across criminal legal and behavioral health systems
- Data dashboards
- Regularly updated data use agreements
- Limit data access as needed via firewalls

## 2. Establish Jurisdiction-Specific Definitions



### Type

The specific jail or other criminal-legal system contacts being measured (e.g., jail bookings, days in jail, days on supervision)



### Number

The number of contacts are measured in two ways:

- A set threshold (e.g., 3+ contacts)
- A proportion of the total population of people booked into jail (e.g., 800 most frequently booked people)



### Time Period

The set period of time over which contacts are counted (e.g., 1, 2, or 5 years)



### Additional Systems

The inclusion of contact with other systems in addition to legal system contact (e.g., emergency services, hospitals, homeless services)

# 3. Use Validated Screening Tools

- Engage in universal screening with validated tools
- Examples
  - Mental health – Brief Jail Mental Health Screen (BJMHS)
  - Trauma – PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5)
  - Drugs – Texas Christian University Drug Screen 5 (TCUDS-5)
  - Alcohol – Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT)
- Share screening results
- Implement quality improvement protocols

## 4. Implement Psychiatric Advance Directives

- Psychiatric advance directives (PADs) enable self-determined treatment
  - Reduce need for coercive interventions
- PADs speed up receipt of treatment
- Must protect confidentiality when using PADs
- Peers should be considered to help people complete PADs

# 5. Facilitate Jail In-Reach Programs

- Allow practitioners to meet with people before release
  - Helps establish trust and engagement
- Follow the APIC model
  - Assess, Plan, Identify, and Coordinate
- Collaboration across systems is needed



## 6. Increase Peer Support Programs

- Peer support is critical
- Be aware of state requirements
- Look to behavioral health providers who may be using peers
- Peers **MUST** be approved to make contact in jails to facilitate connection during short pretrial period

# 7. Improve Access to Housing

- Encourage programs to participate in local Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Continuum of Care
- Work with public housing authorities
- Develop relationships with landlords and apartment management companies
- Consider a shared data platform and dashboard

## 8. Increase Use of Community-Based Services

- Help people navigate the continuum of care
  - For example, “warm handoffs” or shared video chats
- Help with transportation
- Develop telehealth options and integrated treatment for co-occurring disorders
- Use SOAR to access Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance
- Treatment programs should use open enrollment models

# 9. Center and Evaluate Efforts for Racial Equity

- Reducing frequent contact not necessarily = racial equity
  - Be intentional about addressing systemic barriers
  - Evaluate access and outcomes across racial/ethnic subgroups
- Include voices of advocates, families, and people with lived experience at all stages

# Thank you!

Use the QR code below to access the Frequent Jail Contact microsite.



[SafetyAndJusticeChallenge.org](https://SafetyAndJusticeChallenge.org)