

# Fact Sheet: Mental Illness and Jails

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**People with mental illness are significantly overrepresented in jail.**

At mid-year 2002, U.S. jails held 737,912 people.<sup>i</sup>

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Approximately five percent of the US population has a serious mental illness.<sup>ii</sup> The US Department of Justice reports, however, that about 16 percent of the population in prison or jail has a mental illness.<sup>iii</sup>

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In a study of 25 counties in New York State, female recipients of mental health services were 4 to 8.6 times more likely than females in the general population to be incarcerated.<sup>iv</sup>

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The Los Angeles County Jail, the Cook County Jail (Chicago) and Riker's Island (New York City) each hold more people with mental illness on any given day than any psychiatric facility in the United States.<sup>v</sup>

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**They stay in jail longer than other people do...**

In Orange County, Florida, the average inmate identified as having a mental illness stays 51 days, compared with an average stay of 26 days for all inmates.<sup>vi</sup>

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According to the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation, the average length of stay in the New York City jail system for inmates with mental illness is 215 days, compared with a 42 day average stay for all inmates.<sup>vii</sup>

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**...it is extremely expensive to keep them there...**

Pharmacy staff in the Multnomah County, Oregon, jail estimate that slightly over 45 percent of the pharmacy budget is spent on psychotropic medications.<sup>viii</sup>

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The Monroe County, New York, jail spends approximately \$315,000 per year on overtime for deputies who are conducting twenty-four hour suicide watch.<sup>ix</sup>

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**...detention puts them at a high risk for suicide...**

In 2002, the rate of suicide among jail inmates in Ohio was 77 out of every 100,000, seven times the rate in the general population.<sup>x</sup>

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In California, the rate of jail suicides in 2001 was 4.5 times greater than the rate in the general population.<sup>xi</sup>

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**...and after release they are likely to return to incarceration.**

72 percent of people with mental illness were re-arrested within 36 months of release from the Lucas County, Ohio jail.<sup>xii</sup>

90 percent of Los Angeles County jail inmates with mental illness are repeat offenders; an estimated 31 percent have been incarcerated 10 or more times.<sup>xiii</sup>

According to a 1994 study, jail releasees who received fewer of the services that they reported to need were more likely to return to jail.<sup>xiv</sup>

**Providing appropriate community services has proven significantly more cost-effective.**

In the year previous to involvement in the Cook County (IL) Thresholds Jail Program, which provides intensive community-based services to individuals with mental illness who have been involved in the criminal justice system, thirty participants with mental illness spent 2,741 days in jail. In the year after becoming involved, the same thirty participants spent only 489 days in jail. Calculated at \$70 per day, this represents a savings of \$157,640.<sup>xv</sup>

A similar program in Monroe County (NY), Project Link, showed a reduction in jail costs for the project's 46 participants with mental illness of \$30,908 to \$7,235 per person over one year.<sup>xvi</sup>

<sup>i</sup> Paige M. Harrison and Jennifer C. Karberg. *Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2002*. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, April 2003.

<sup>ii</sup> R. C. Kessler et al., "A Methodology for Estimating the 12-Month Prevalence of Serious Mental Illness," In *Mental Health United States 1999*, edited by R.W. Manderscheid and M.J. Henderson, Rockville, MD, Center for Mental Health Services.

<sup>iii</sup> Paula M. Ditton, *Mental Health Treatment of Inmates and Probationers*, Washington DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, July 1999.

<sup>iv</sup> Judith F. Cox, Pamela C. Morschauser, Steven Banks, and James L. Stone. *A Five-Year Population Study of Persons Involved in the Mental Health and Local Correctional Systems: Implications for Service Planning*. *Journal of Behavioral Health Services and Research* 28:2, May 2001.

<sup>v</sup> E. Fuller Torrey, "Reinventing Mental Health Care," *City Journal* 9:4, Autumn 1999.

<sup>vi</sup> Unpublished statistic courtesy of Dr. Patrick Jablonski, Research Statistician, Orange County Jail.

<sup>vii</sup> Fox Butterfield, "Prisons Replace Hospitals for the Nation's Mentally Ill," *New York Times*, March 5, 1998, at A1.

<sup>viii</sup> Jim Carlson, Robert Buckler, Bill Midkiff, and Jack Pladel. *Psychiatric Alerts in Multnomah County Jails 1995-1999: Reducing Crime Benchmark Analysis*. March 2000.

<sup>ix</sup> Unpublished statistic courtesy of Captain John Caceci, Monroe County Sheriff's Office, Monroe County, New York.

<sup>x</sup> Unpublished statistic courtesy of the Ohio Department of Corrections, Bureau of Adult Detention, 2002.

<sup>xi</sup> "In California's county jails, suicides are up sharply." Associated Press, June 16, 2002.

<sup>xii</sup> Lois A. Ventura, Charlene A. Cassel, Joseph E. Jacoby, and Bu Huang, "Case Management and Recidivism of Mentally Ill Persons Released from Jail," *Psychiatric Services* 49:10, October 1998.

<sup>xiii</sup> Unpublished statistic courtesy of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors' Task Force on Incarcerated Mentally Ill, 1991.

<sup>xiv</sup> Phyllis Solomon, Jeffrey Draine, and Arthur Meyerson. "Jail Recidivism and Receipt of Community Mental Health Services." *Hospital and Community Psychiatry* 45:8, August 1994.

<sup>xv</sup> Statistics available at [www.thresholds.org](http://www.thresholds.org).

<sup>xvi</sup> Statistics available in Project Link profile at [http://consensusproject.org/programs/one?program\\_id=148](http://consensusproject.org/programs/one?program_id=148).

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