

Fulton County is committed to improving its criminal justice system and how offenders<sup>i</sup> with mental illness and co-occurring disorders are adjudicated and transitioned back into the community. Tackling this issue began in 2014 with the identification of several strategies related to improving access to justice for the mentally ill in the Superior Court of Fulton County's 2014–2016 strategic plan. One of those strategies led directly to convening the Metro Atlanta Justice Mental Health Symposium in 2015, which brought together mental health and judicial partners from metro Atlanta and throughout the state to refine and define issues related to mental health and the criminal justice system. Out of the symposium came a commitment from the county to the Stepping Up Initiative, resulting in adoption of the Stepping Up Resolution by the Board of Commissioners in May 2016.

To move the strategic plan forward, in 2016 the Superior Court applied for and received a Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program (JMHP) two-year planning grant from the US Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance. This grant provided an opportunity for mental health, criminal justice, and other interested stakeholders from throughout Fulton County to better understand and identify gaps in the process of how offenders with a mental illness or co-occurring disorder interact with and move through the Fulton County criminal justice system and re-enter the community.

**The Stepping Up Initiative, launched in May 2015, is a national effort by the National Association of Counties (NACo), the American Psychiatric Association Foundation, and the Council of State Governments Justice Center to combat the swelling numbers of people with mental illness in US jails. These partners recognized the critical role that local and state officials play in systems change. According to the initiative's website, "Stepping Up is a national movement to provide counties with the tools they need to develop cross-systems, data-driven strategies that can lead to measurable reductions in the number of people with mental illnesses and co-occurring disorders in jails."**

Throughout the project, the Task Force members and project team worked to address the Stepping Up Initiative six questions county leaders need to ask:

- Is our leadership committed?
- Do we conduct timely screening and assessments?
- Do we have baseline data?
- Do we conduct a comprehensive process analysis and inventory of services?
- Have we prioritized policy, practice, and funding improvements?
- Do we track progress?

<sup>i</sup> Throughout this report, the term "offender" is used to refer to an individual involved in the criminal justice system, whether he or she is in jail, convicted of a crime or not, awaiting trial, or awaiting transfer to another jurisdiction or prison.

On any given day, there are approximately 2,500 offenders in Fulton County Jail, of which between 40% and 70% are mentally ill.<sup>1</sup> Those with a mental illness remain in jail an average of 58 days compared to only 26 days for those without a mental illness. The Fulton County Justice and Mental Health Task Force was created to identify gaps in Fulton County’s behavioral health and criminal justice systems to reduce the number of people booked into jail who have a mental illness, shorten their average length of stay, connect them to appropriate care, and drive down recidivism rates in Fulton County (the four key measures of the Stepping Up Initiative). The Task Force brought together a wide variety of local, state, public, and private stakeholders monthly from June to December 2017 to create a shared vision and plan to affect these four key measures.

Making changes to law enforcement practices and court processes while increasing access to community treatment and housing programs, as well as improving public awareness, in a county with the size and diversity of Fulton County and its many cities is complex. Fulton County is the largest county in Georgia by population, with slightly more than 1 million residents in 2016, nearly evenly divided between Whites (46%) and Blacks (45%), with another 7% Asian. The population is well educated: More than 90% of residents have a high school diploma or higher. The median household income is nearly \$59,000, but 16% of the population lives in poverty.<sup>2</sup>

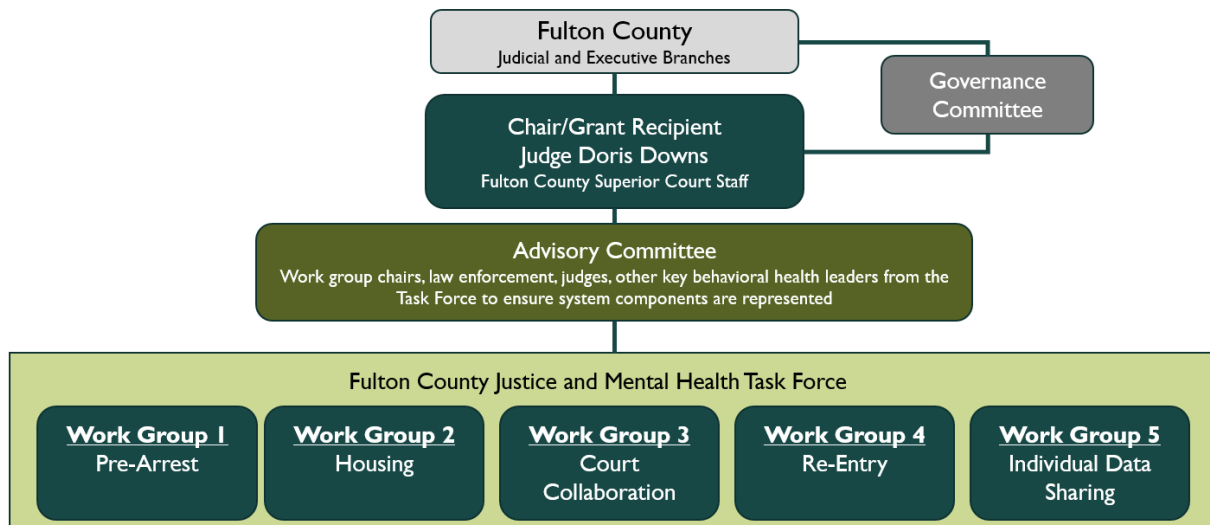
Fulton County has 15 municipalities, including the City of Atlanta. Fourteen of the 15 municipalities maintain their own law enforcement agencies, in addition to at least nine educational law enforcement/public safety agencies. Multiple state and federal law enforcement agencies also operate within the county. At least eight 911 emergency systems exist within the county, serving multiple jurisdictions and public safety agencies. While Fulton County contains at least seven adult city, state, and federal prisons, jails, and detention centers, this project focused primarily on the operations of Fulton County Jail and, to a lesser extent, the Atlanta City Detention Center, run by the City of Atlanta.

## PROJECT STRUCTURE

In 2016, the Superior Court of Fulton County applied for and received a \$250,000 Category 1 JMHCP grant from the US Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance. The JMHCP grant program emphasizes improving collaboration between criminal justice and mental health partners. The Superior Court contracted with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia to assist with documentation, identification, and organization of data, meeting facilitation, analysis, and project management. Policy Research Associates, Inc. (PRA) was engaged to conduct a two-day Sequential Intercept Mapping (SIM) Workshop.

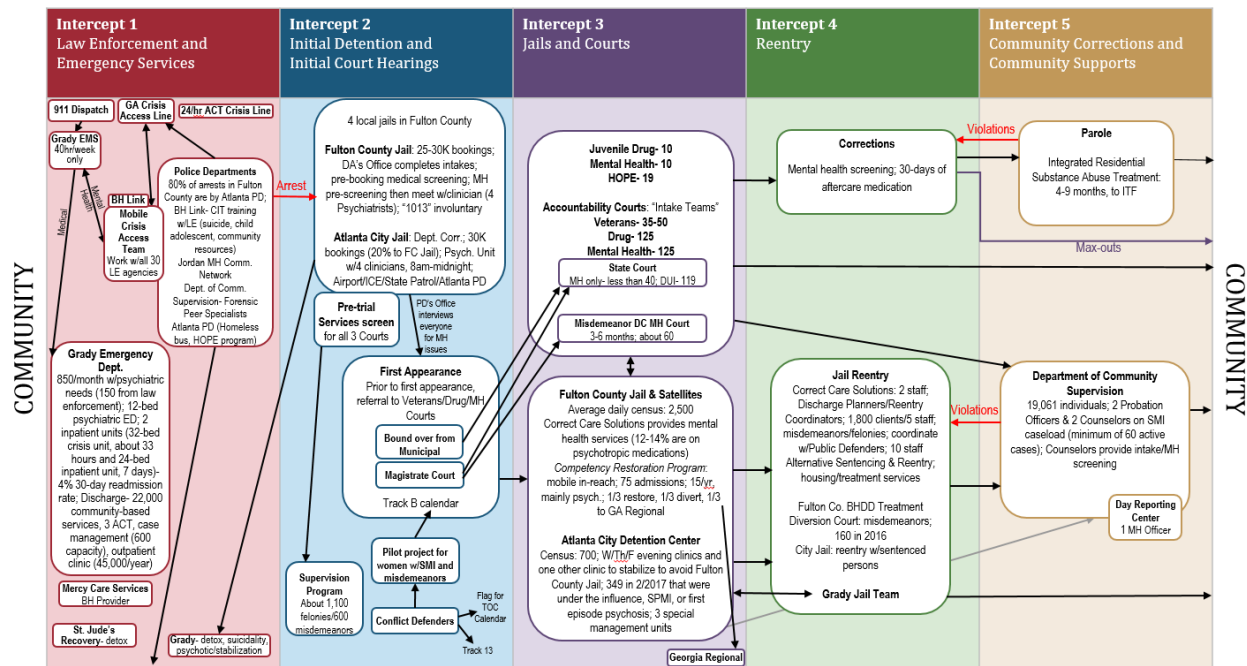
Superior Court Judge Doris Downs chaired the project, and representatives from more than 70 stakeholder organizations participated in Task Force meetings and project activities. After the initial kickoff meeting in January 2017, the Task Force met monthly between June and December 2017. The Task Force was composed of representatives from Fulton County agencies, state agencies, housing providers, behavioral health providers, community stakeholders, health care providers, and law enforcement.

**Figure 1. Project Governance Structure**



The first step toward improving the present system’s outcomes was to conduct a comprehensive process analysis and inventory of services. This included an inventory of the relevant policies, practices, evidence-based programs, and treatment options that currently exist within Fulton County. To understand the flow of persons with mental illness through the Fulton County criminal justice system, the Task Force engaged in a series of process mapping exercises. The initial process mapping (see Figure 2) was done by PRA during a SIM Workshop. Representatives from the Fulton County court system, behavioral health providers, housing providers, and other stakeholders presented valuable insights and information on how offenders with mental illness can come into contact with the justice system at different “intercepts,” or points, along the justice continuum. More detailed process mapping was then completed by the Institute of Government to understand the role each stakeholder plays at each intercept and to identify gaps in services from community providers and pre-arrest to adjudication to re-entry. A full set of detailed process maps are available in the full report.

Figure 2. Sequential Intercept Model Map for Fulton County



Source: Policy Research Associates, Inc.

Based on the results of the SIM Workshop, the Task Force organized into five work groups:

1. Pre-Arrest Work Group — to develop pre-arrest diversion strategies
2. Housing Work Group — to research expanding housing options
3. Court Collaboration Work Group — to improve court collaboration
4. Re-entry Work Group — to refine and expand re-entry options
5. Data Work Group — to assess the feasibility of a coordinated database to provide better information sharing regarding offenders with behavioral health disorders in the criminal justice system

Each work group met monthly, if not more often, from June through November 2017 and developed a set of findings and recommendations to address one of the four key measures of the Stepping Up Initiative. The efforts of the work groups were supplemented with interviews and site visits. The Task Force also developed a set of standardized definitions that included mental illness, recidivism, length of stay, co-occurring disorder, and substance use disorder, among other terms.

## CURRENT CONDITIONS

### Fulton County Jail

The Task Force gathered baseline data about the current state of activities in Fulton County related to serving offenders with mental illness in the criminal justice system. An average of more than 32,000 bookings occurred in Fulton County Jail each year between 2012 and 2016. Additional data are needed to accurately calculate the percentage of offenders with mental illness, but it is estimated that the number ranges from as low as 40% to as high as 70%.<sup>3</sup>

Table 1. Fulton County Jail Bookings and Mental Health Caseload Data, 2013–2017

	Total Booked Into Fulton County Jail Per Year	Total Number of Mental Health Contacts Per Year	Average Monthly		
			Ongoing Care/Active Mental Health Caseload	Number of Patients on Psychotropic Medication	Number of Prescriptions for Psychotropic Medication
2013	34,786	30,645	1,674	260	572
2014	29,627	33,682	2,121	256	553
2015	26,063	40,641	2,781	325	899
2016	24,608	37,359	2,609	316	923
2017	NA	14,037	1,856	336	841

Note: Data for 2017 represent January through June only. The total number of mental health contacts includes initial assessments of those offenders who screen positive for mental illness, self- or staff referrals for evaluation, and any daily, weekly, or monthly visits deemed necessary.

Sources: Fulton County Pretrial Services Intake Unit, Monthly Intake Unit Statistics. Fulton County Jail Medical Administrative Committee Meeting, Monthly Administrative Census Reports.

The Task Force learned that the mentally ill on average spend much longer in Fulton County Jail awaiting trial than do those without a mental illness: 58 days versus only 26 days.<sup>ii</sup> This fact has cost implications for the jail and the county. The average cost per day to house an offender between 2011 and 2015 was \$75.37.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, it costs Fulton County \$1,960 to house an offender for 26 days (the average length of stay for those not on the mentally ill caseload) compared to \$4,371 for 58 days (the average length of stay for those who are mentally ill). In addition, an offender who is mentally ill likely uses a disproportionate share of medical and mental health services compared to an offender who is not mentally ill: In 2012, an average of 261 offenders were on psychotropic medication, costing an average of \$41,000 per month.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>ii</sup> Calculations based on deidentified charging, booking, and demographic data provided from Odyssey, Fulton County’s court information management system. Data on a portion of the mental health caseload supplied from ERMA, Correct Care Solutions’ medical management system for Fulton County Jail.

Mentally ill offenders at Fulton County Jail are treated and managed by the contracted medical and mental health provider. (Correct Care Solutions was the medical and mental health provider during 2017.) Upon intake/booking, all offenders are supposed to receive a medical screening, which includes questions about the offender’s mental health. Referrals for further mental health assessments are made if indicated by screening results. Within 14 days of booking, all offenders with a positive screen for mental health are supposed to be seen by and receive a follow-up assessment from a mental health professional. Even if offenders do not screen positive on the initial mental health screen, they can be referred later via a self-referral or by a staff member based either on symptoms not identified during the initial booking process or new symptoms that appear during incarceration.

Fulton County Jail’s Rice Street location currently houses the jail-based Competency Restoration Program, as an alternative to sending offenders to Georgia Regional Hospital, where there is a waiting list for forensic beds. Emory University, Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (Georgia DBHDD), and Fulton County Jail jointly developed the program in response to Fulton County’s high utilization of state psychiatric forensic beds.

### **Fulton County Courts**

Fulton County has five court levels: Juvenile, Magistrate, Probate, State, and Superior. At the Juvenile, Magistrate, and Superior Court levels, there are specific courts to adjudicate offenders who are mentally ill. This project specifically focused on the Superior and Magistrate Courts.

The Superior Court has the behavioral/mental health and adult felony drug accountability courts. The Behavioral Health Treatment Court provides treatment alternatives to sentencing for defendants with a diagnosed mental illness. To be eligible for the program, participants must have an appropriate diagnosis, have suitable housing, and be compliant in taking their prescribed medication. Adult Felony Drug Court is a program for felony offenders addicted to alcohol and/or drugs, many of whom also have a mental health diagnosis. Both courts are felony diversion programs, meaning that upon successfully completing the requirements of the accountability court program, charges are often dropped. Participation in either court is voluntary.

To address the increasing number of Fulton County Jail offenders diagnosed with a mental illness who are charged with misdemeanors, the Fulton County Magistrate Court created the Treatment Diversion Court (TDC)<sup>iii</sup> in 2003. TDC’s mission is to divert misdemeanor offenders in need of mental health treatment out of prosecution and into community-based treatment.

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<sup>iii</sup> As of January 2018, the Magistrate Treatment Diversion Court is unfunded.

## Prosecutors and Public Defenders

Each of the county-wide prosecutors and public defenders plays an important role in identifying and seeking treatment or alternative sentences for offenders with a mental illness or co-occurring disorder. The Fulton County District Attorney prosecutes adult felonies in the Behavioral Health Treatment Court and Adult Felony Drug Court, while the Fulton County Solicitor General prosecutes misdemeanor violations of state laws and Fulton County ordinances, including in the TDC.

The Offices of the Public Defender and the Conflict Defender defend adult indigent clients; the Public Defender handles felony cases in the Superior Court, including the Behavioral Health Treatment Court and the Adult Felony Drug Court, and the Conflict Defender handles misdemeanors in State and Magistrate Courts, including the TDC. Both have social workers and behavioral health specialists on staff to assist clients with a mental illness or co-occurring disorders. Through its Alternative Sentencing Unit, the Public Defender's Office helps place clients in behavioral health treatment or addiction recovery, rather than incarceration.

## Behavioral Health Services

### Fulton County Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities

The Fulton County Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (Fulton County DBHDD) serves mentally ill individuals involved in the criminal justice system in collaboration with the Fulton County Sheriff's Office, Fulton County Jail, the Fulton County Treatment Diversion Court, and the Fulton County court system. Fulton County DBHDD runs two open-access, community-based mental health treatment facilities.

In 2017, the Fulton County Board of Commissioners voted to create a new county-wide behavioral health model by selecting two partner agencies to provide behavioral health services for the county. This partnership will allow the county to expand its capacity to serve more people with mental illnesses in a more cost-effective manner. This model of service delivery will allow the county to request additional state funds for mental health and substance abuse services. In addition, the new providers are expected to coordinate "with the criminal justice system to support better diversion efforts/initiatives, and establish a behavioral health continuum of care for inmates designed to break the vicious cycle."<sup>6</sup>

### Grady Memorial Hospital

Grady Memorial Hospital is the county's safety-net hospital and a critical partner in treating the mentally ill, not just in the community, but in concert with law enforcement and first responders, as well as those recently released from jail. Grady's behavioral health services include a psychiatric emergency room, a crisis stabilization unit, inpatient and outpatient

treatment, a behavioral health observation unit, assertive community treatment (ACT) teams,<sup>iv</sup> psychosocial rehabilitation, peer support, case management and intensive case management, and individual and group treatment. Grady provides outpatient behavioral health services at a separate location from the hospital. In addition, Grady has partnered with a behavioral health provider to have a clinician ride with Grady Emergency Medical Services during certain hours to better respond to mental health crises and divert individuals from the Grady emergency room.

### Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities

Another important behavioral health provider is Georgia DBHDD. The state funds a host of programs through contracts with a variety of large and small providers including Grady and community service boards (CSB). Georgia DBHDD works closely with CSBs and other providers across the state to provide safety-net mental health services through crisis stabilization units; state hospitals, including Georgia Regional Hospital–Atlanta; and residential and nonresidential community-based treatment programs. As part of a new behavioral health strategy, Fulton County has contracted with River Edge (a CSB based out of Macon, Georgia) to provide adult core behavioral health services in the county.

Two services run by Georgia DBHDD are particularly relevant to this project: the Georgia Crisis and Access Line (GCAL) and housing programs. GCAL is a 24/7 hotline for accessing mental health services throughout Georgia. Nearly 40% of callers are individuals calling for themselves, 16% are calls for assistance for a friend or family member, and the remainder are treatment providers seeking assistance for someone under their care or in their services. The hotline is an effective alternative to calling 911 and can keep the mentally ill out of jail: GCAL estimates that only 9% of its calls need further law enforcement assistance.<sup>7</sup> In collaboration with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), which administers federal housing funds for the state, Georgia DBHDD also helps fund and coordinate housing for persons with mental illness who are transitioning into the community setting.

## FINDINGS

The work groups were responsible for information and resource sharing and assessing the current criminal justice and behavioral health systems to determine whether elements are in place to implement evidence-based practices that address the needs of the mentally ill involved

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<sup>iv</sup> “Assertive community treatment (ACT) is a team-based treatment model that provides multidisciplinary, flexible treatment and support to people with mental illness 24/7. ACT is based around the idea that people receive better care when their mental health care providers work together. ACT team members help the person address every aspect of their life, whether it be medication, therapy, social support, employment or housing.” (Psychosocial Treatment, National Alliance on Mental Health, [www.nami.org/Learn-More/Treatment/Psychosocial-Treatments](http://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Treatment/Psychosocial-Treatments))



in the Fulton County criminal justice system. The work groups then developed strategies for building more support for evidence-based practices and programs to address the four key measures of the Stepping Up Initiative. The following is a summary of the major findings from the Task Force and the five work groups.

**All law enforcement officers need increased access to adequate and appropriate mental health training to improve crisis response and pre-arrest diversion.**

Law enforcement officers respond to a wide variety of situations, including 911 calls involving individuals with a mental illness. Their ability to respond appropriately can impact mental health outcomes and the likelihood of arrest. Therefore, it is important for all officers to have adequate and appropriate training. Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training, Mental Health First Aid, and Trauma-Informed Training were identified as sound mental health training curricula for law enforcement officers and other criminal justice staff. The City of Atlanta Police Department has implemented CIT as part of its basic training. As of July 2017, approximately 500 of 1,800 officers had received CIT training. Resources are available, including through the Georgia Public Safety Training Center and the National Alliance on Mental Illness, to fund and deliver mental health training to all law enforcement entities.

**Crisis stabilization and outpatient resources are important “drop-off” locations for law enforcement and behavioral health mobile resources to divert individuals from jail. However, these resources are overwhelmed by current demand.**

Increasing “drop-off” options for law enforcement is critical to reducing the number of individuals with a mental illness or co-occurring disorder who are booked into Fulton County Jail. When discussing strategies to divert individuals with mental illness from arrest and jail during Task Force and work group meetings, participants often asked, “Divert to what?” Law enforcement officers and behavioral health mobile responders need drop-off points for individuals in mental health crisis as effective alternatives to jail. Georgia DBHDD provides funding for behavioral health crisis centers, but Fulton County has not been able to take advantage of that funding opportunity. Because Fulton County does not have a state-funded crisis stabilization unit or behavioral health crisis center, Grady Hospital is the county’s primary provider of psychiatric emergency and crisis stabilization services. Between 2012 and the first third of 2017, the average monthly number of visitors to the psychiatric emergency room increased from 596 to 862.<sup>8</sup>

Grady Hospital also provides adult walk-in outpatient services at its 10 Park Place facility. In 2016, there were 47,158 visits, which exceeded Grady’s forecasted estimate by 13%.<sup>9</sup> Most of the

services at 10 Park Place are funded by Georgia DBHDD, and this facility can serve as a drop-off location for less severe cases.

**The foundation for good re-entry outcomes begins with the identification and stabilization of individuals with mental illness. Many criminal justice entities conduct eligibility screenings for intake into their programs that include questions about the offender’s mental health history. However, each uses a different screening tool, and the results do not follow the offender.**

To determine eligibility, many Fulton County criminal justice programs screen potential participants. These screenings often include questions about an offender’s mental health history; however, none of the questions constitute a validated mental health screening. Some of the entities that conduct screenings include the Fulton County Jail medical/mental health provider (at intake/booking), Fulton County Pretrial Services, Fulton County accountability courts, Fulton County Treatment Diversion Court, and the Alternative Sentencing Unit of the Fulton County Office of the Public Defender.

Appropriate mental health screening and identification starts the diagnostic and treatment process; providing stability throughout the process improves outcomes, which, in turn, can shorten an offender’s length of stay in jail. The identification of mental illness is dependent upon standardized screening tools. At least one study found that without the universal use of reliable screening tools, a jail fails to identify more than 60% of offenders with serious mental illness.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, to enhance efforts to identify mental illness, the county could implement a validated mental health screening instrument that would be administered to all individuals who are booked into Fulton County Jail. This screening instrument would be separate from and in addition to the current medical screening. Offenders would then receive appropriate referrals to mental health staff for full evaluation and diagnosis.

Sharing screening results across agencies or programs would help eliminate duplication of effort and ensure identification of mentally ill offenders and continuity of appropriate behavioral health services as offenders move through the criminal justice system. Several validated jail mental health screens that are in the public domain and free are used by local jails around the country.

**The official list of medications provided by the Fulton County Jail medical and mental health provider is different from that of Grady Memorial Hospital and Georgia Regional Hospital.**

Correct Care Solutions, the Fulton County Jail medical and mental health provider in 2017, does not prescribe the same formulary as Grady Hospital or Georgia Regional Hospital–Atlanta. This can cause problems if an offender is sent to either location for psychiatric stabilization. If the offender is prescribed a particular medication while at one of these locations, he or she may not necessarily receive the same medication upon return to Fulton County Jail. Due to the way psychotropic medications work on the brain, the offender may decompensate on a different medication and need to be returned to Grady or Georgia Regional Hospital for stabilization again, creating a cycle that can keep a mentally ill offender in jail longer than necessary.

**Court diversion programs can reduce the length of stay, make connections to community treatment, improve treatment outcomes, and reduce recidivism. No court diversion option exists for defendants in State Court.**

Accountability courts and other court diversion programs have been successful in reducing the length of stay in jail and improving mental health outcomes. Fulton County operates two diversionary court programs for individuals with mental illness: the Behavioral Health Treatment Court at the Superior Court level (one of Georgia’s accountability courts) and the Treatment Diversion Court<sup>v</sup> (part of the Magistrate Court). Both programs require community treatment, employment, and accountability. No court diversion option exists for defendants in State Court. This is particularly important given that defendants miss opportunities for Treatment Diversion Court when they come through municipal courts—in 2016, that amounted to nearly 35,000 defendants.<sup>11</sup>

**An integrated and effective discharge/re-entry process, with clear roles and responsibilities for all parties, is needed to ensure that individuals with mental illness receive the proper care in the community after they are released from jail.**

Discharge/re-entry activities are designed to connect offenders with community treatment and housing providers, prevent the need for stabilization/crisis intervention services, decrease recidivism, and reduce the length of stay in jail by clearing obstacles for release. Ensuring an appropriate amount of medication to get through any transition is particularly important. Prioritizing offenders with serious and persistent mental illness for discharge/re-entry activities will help them get connected to services earlier. The Task Force found that effective planning for re-entry starts at booking.

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<sup>v</sup> As of January 2018, the Magistrate Treatment Diversion Court is unfunded.

**The state has established procedures that require eligible individuals to access housing options through Georgia DBHDD-contracted community treatment providers.**

Georgia DBHDD and DCA administer housing programs and funds and have created a unified referral process to ensure the most efficient use of federal and state housing funds. Access to housing through the unified referral process is made through Georgia DBHDD-contracted community treatment providers. Treatment providers verify eligibility and make housing referrals. Neither Fulton County Jail nor its medical and mental health provider are Georgia DBHDD-contracted community treatment providers, and therefore, cannot make eligibility determinations or housing referrals.

**Data related to the operational management of different components of the criminal justice system are generally available and used within each entity. However, data are not shared and used across entities, nor are data integrated for system analysis or management. Obtaining data from various entities can be difficult.**

Operational data are critical to the management of services for the mentally ill in the criminal justice system. Data provide insights into the prevalence of mental illness in jail, the need for certain services, bed space required, and treatment options, as well as costs for staffing, medications, and other expenses. Generally, such operational data are available and used by managers throughout Fulton County’s criminal justice and behavioral health systems, but there is little to no data sharing among different county programs and agencies serving mentally ill offenders.

The system-level integration and analysis of data related to mentally ill offenders is important for assessing program success, determining the proper allocation of resources, and making continuous improvement efforts. Appropriate data collection, residing in one database and properly managed and analyzed, is an important step Fulton County can take to achieve the goals in the county’s strategic plan and the Stepping Up Initiative.

## Keeping Score

**The Stepping Up Initiative measures success based on progress made on four key measures:**

- Reducing the number of people with mental illnesses booked into jail
- Shortening the length of time spent in jail
- Increasing connections to treatment
- Lowering recidivism

## RECOMMENDATIONS

At the December 2017 Task Force meeting, the chairs of the work groups presented more than 30 recommendations. The Task Force then prioritized the recommendations to improve processes and practices that will impact the Stepping Up Initiative’s four key measures. Based upon voting at that meeting, the Task Force identified the following five priority recommendations:

- Implement a validated jail mental health screen for 100% of bookings. Institute a standardized process in Fulton County Jail for identifying, assessing, and treating mentally ill offenders based on clinically sound best practices and verifiable data.
- Develop and implement a strategy for coordinated information sharing between re-entry providers and community stakeholders to improve case coordination. Establish data-sharing agreements between Fulton County Jail, the mentally ill offender’s behavioral health provider, and/or the Atlanta City Detention Center for improved access to services. Explore, create, and implement a network information-sharing database and data-sharing agreements to be used by all justice and justice-serving entities.
- Develop and implement a standardized training plan aimed at training 100% of law enforcement officers using Crisis Intervention Training, trauma-informed responses, and other evidence-based crisis trainings.
- Continue and expand funding for jail diversion services (the Treatment Diversion Court model) for Magistrate and State Courts.
- Designate Fulton County Jail inmates with severe and persistent mental illness facing homelessness on release as being at “imminent risk” of homelessness so that care navigation can begin before release.

## CONCLUSION

The Stepping Up Initiative lists six questions that counties need to ask to make strides in reducing the number of offenders with a mental illness or co-occurring disorder in jail:

1. Is our leadership committed?
2. Do we conduct timely screening and assessments?
3. Do we have baseline data?
4. Do we conduct a comprehensive process analysis and inventory of services?
5. Have we prioritized policy, practice, and funding improvements?
6. Do we track progress?

The Superior Court of Fulton County is moving the county forward in improving its criminal justice system and how offenders with mental illness and co-occurring disorders are adjudicated and transitioned back into the community. The county leadership supports the effort and is taking the steps necessary to address the findings and recommendations of the Task Force.

Through the comprehensive process analysis and inventory of services completed by the Task Force as part of this project, many opportunities for improvement were identified. The Task Force identified the need for timely screening and assessments and the need for data sharing and reporting as its top two priorities. In the next phase of work, the county will focus on estimating the cost and potential impact of strategies to implement the recommendations. The county also will evaluate how county-funded activities are impacted by the process improvements and policy changes identified by the Task Force and whether any county resources could be leveraged to address the findings and recommendations. Additionally, more research is needed to identify external funding streams that could help support improvements and close gaps.

The work carried out by the Task Force directly supports the 2016–2019 Fulton County Strategic Plan<sup>12</sup> goal that all people are safe. Specifically, one of the key strategies to achieving this goal is to “effectively address the increasing populations of mentally ill, drug/alcohol-dependent, and homeless individuals who overwhelm the public safety system.” The recommendations in this report will help Fulton County move toward training law enforcement personnel in how to handle and divert the mentally ill from jail; improving community mental health treatment options; strengthening partnerships between law enforcement, the courts, and community treatment providers; and improving housing options for the mentally ill, particularly those who are homeless.

Collaboration has been the key factor to the success of this project and is critical to long-term sustainability and achieving shared outcomes. Fulton County is a large jurisdiction and continued outreach efforts to engage the many municipalities and partners will help broaden the impact. While there has been participation from the City of Atlanta and the municipalities, opportunity remains to forge deeper partnerships to achieve true systems reform.

It is important to acknowledge that the City of Atlanta, under the new leadership of Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, has been ambitious in reform efforts that will impact the four key measures of the Stepping Up Initiative. As an example, in February 2018 Atlanta City Council unanimously eliminated cash bail for most people in the Atlanta Municipal Court. These bail

reform efforts are directly in line with the Stepping Up key measure of reducing an offender's average length of stay.

The work of the Task Force and the work groups has been a data-informed, participant-driven process. The collaborative Task Force process enabled conversations across organizational boundaries, resulting in new levels of understanding, new partnerships, and new solutions. Several partners have already reassessed their processes and implemented changes.

The goal of reducing the number of people with mental illness in Fulton County Jail will require changes to current processes, policies, and practices. Support systems, public awareness, committed partners, and options for diversion are needed to achieve that goal. The members of the Fulton County Justice and Mental Health Task Force are committed to moving the work forward.

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<sup>1</sup> Ban, Charlie. 2016, October 3. "Fulton County Moving Far Away from Jail's Troubled Past." *National Association of Counties*. Retrieved from [www.naco.org/articles/fulton-county-moving-far-away-jail%E2%80%99s-troubled-past](http://www.naco.org/articles/fulton-county-moving-far-away-jail%E2%80%99s-troubled-past).

<sup>2</sup> Fulton County, Georgia QuickFacts. US Census Bureau. Retrieved from [www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/fultoncountygeorgia/PST045216](http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/fultoncountygeorgia/PST045216).

<sup>3</sup> Ban, Charlie.

<sup>4</sup> Calculations based upon county jail expenditures data reported by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, Public Safety Information. Retrieved from [www.dca.ga.gov/development/Research/programs/publicSafetyInfo.asp](http://www.dca.ga.gov/development/Research/programs/publicSafetyInfo.asp).

<sup>5</sup> Visser, Steve. 2014, December 24. "Fulton Jail Program Gets the Mentally Ill Ready for Trial." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Retrieved from [www.ajc.com/news/crime--law/fulton-jail-program-gets-the-mentally-ill-ready-for-trial/ar70639An1KTxg1KnwVuaN/](http://www.ajc.com/news/crime--law/fulton-jail-program-gets-the-mentally-ill-ready-for-trial/ar70639An1KTxg1KnwVuaN/).

<sup>6</sup> Fulton County Government. 2017, December 13. "Behavioral Health to Begin New Service Delivery Plan in January" [Press release]. Retrieved from [www.fultoncountyga.gov/images/stories/Behavioral\\_Health/NEWS\\_RELEASE\\_-\\_Behavioral\\_Health\\_to\\_Transition\\_Service\\_to\\_Community\\_Partners\\_12-13-17.pdf](http://www.fultoncountyga.gov/images/stories/Behavioral_Health/NEWS_RELEASE_-_Behavioral_Health_to_Transition_Service_to_Community_Partners_12-13-17.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Behavioral Health Link presentation to the Fulton County Justice and Mental Health Task Force, October 24, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Data provided by Grady Memorial Hospital.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Steadman, Henry, Jack E. Scott, Fred Osher, Tara K. Agnese, and Pamela Clarke Robbins. 2005. "Validation of the Brief Jail Mental Health Screen." *Psychiatric Services* 56(7), 816-822.

<sup>11</sup> Data provided by the Office of the Fulton County Solicitor General.

<sup>12</sup> Fulton County Office of County Manager. 2016–2019 *Fulton County Strategic Plan*. Retrieved from [docs.google.com/viewerng/viewer?url=https://performance.fultoncountyga.gov/api/file\\_data/52504700-61e1-49f5-82a1-8618178fd0cb](https://docs.google.com/viewerng/viewer?url=https://performance.fultoncountyga.gov/api/file_data/52504700-61e1-49f5-82a1-8618178fd0cb).