

County of Los Angeles-Department of Mental Health Mental Health Court Linkage Program

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Mental Health Court Linkage Program, a part of the Adult Justice Bureau of the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health, provides services to individuals with a mental illness who have encountered the criminal justice system. There are currently 5 established programs that are tasked to meet consumers' needs for care over incarceration and reflect the department's no wrong door policy for providing opportunities to achieve health, wellness, and recovery.

COURT LIAISON PROGRAM

The Court Liaison Program is a problem-solving collaboration between the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (DMH) and the Los Angeles County Superior Court. It is staffed by a team of 14 mental health clinicians who are co-located at 22 courts countywide. This recovery based program serves adults with a mental illness or co-occurring disorder who are involved with the criminal justice system. The objectives of the program are to increase coordination and collaboration between the criminal justice and mental health systems, improve access to mental health services and supports, and enhance continuity of care. The Court Liaison Program further aims to provide ongoing support to families and to educate the court and the community at large regarding the specific needs of these individuals. Participation is voluntary and available to those 18 and above. Funding is provided by the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA/Prop 63).

Services include:

- On-site courthouse outreach to defendants
- Individual service needs assessment
- Inform consumers and the Court of appropriate treatment options
- Develop alternative and post-release plans that take into account best fit treatment alternatives and Court stipulations
- Link consumers to treatment programs and expedite mental health referrals
- Advocate for the mental health needs of consumers throughout the criminal proceedings
- Provide support and assistance to defendants and families in navigating the court system

Court liaisons work in close and complementary fashion with the mental health clinicians and discharge planners located in the Twin Towers Correctional and Century Regional Detention Facilities. In addition to combining efforts to secure appropriate linkage, Jail MH staff provides up to date mental health status information, initial assessments for higher levels of care and conservatorships, scripts for discharging consumers, and rapid response on emerging issues related to the linkage and discharge process. Court liaisons provide the jail staff with real time court case information to aid in their own discharge planning process, as well as providing a conduit to attorneys and judges with whom they work with on a daily basis to ensure linkage to the community that is rapid and clinically appropriate.

Referral Process

Referrals are initiated via the mental health liaison assigned to each court. It is important to make contact with the liaison as soon as a defense attorney has been appointed.

Defendant Eligibility Factors

- Established Mental Illness or Co-Occurring Substance Disorder
- 18 years and over
- Readiness to engage in treatment

Legal Eligibility Factors

- Case in pre-disposition status
- Alternative sentencing is at the discretion of the court
- Defense attorney and client approval required for services
- Exclusions: Convictions requiring registration or associated behaviors (e.g. fire setting)

COMMUNITY REINTEGRATION PROGRAM

The Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (DMH), through the Mental Health Court Linkage Community Reintegration Program (CRP), offers an alternative to incarceration for defendants with a mental illness, including those with co-occurring substance abuse disorders. The goal of the Community Reintegration Program (CRP) and its two participating providers is to reintegrate clients into the community with the skills and resources necessary to maintain stability and avoid re-arrest.

These two specialty programs are able to treat 67 clients, with 50 beds in the locked program and 17 beds in our residential program. Clients are evaluated by the CRP team to determine whether they meet the criteria for admission. Participants must have a mental illness, agree to maintain compliance with prescribed psychotropic medication, be able to benefit from treatment, and be able to get along with peers in a co-ed, adult residential setting.

In order to be considered for the CRP, the defendants' defense counsel must request an evaluation prior to sentencing. Clients who are approved by the court to participate in the program are given the option to do so in lieu of incarceration. Clients' participation is voluntary and they have the option of refusing entry. For those who agree to the program, a court order is generated and the exact length of time is determined by the court during sentencing. Most residents are sentenced to a one year stay, though there are exceptions when the stay can be as short as six months. The courts are kept aware of the clients through quarterly progress reports generated by their individual therapists with input from the treatment team.

Community Reintegration Program (CRP) collaborates closely with Jail Mental Health and custody staff at Twin Towers Correctional Facility and Century Regional Detention Facility. During the evaluation process, if the CRP team requires more information to determine an inmate/client's eligibility for the program, CRP staff will contact the jail mental health clinician for consultation. After inmates are approved for the program, a CRP staff contacts the State Desk for the release of the inmates when a bed

becomes available at our treatment facility. In addition, Jail Mental Health staff are contacted for psychotropic medication prescriptions to be made available to bring to the treatment facility. On the day of release, CRP transportation staff coordinate with Custody Line at the jails for receiving the inmate and his or her property to be transported to the programs. CRP program works closely with custody staff and Jail Mental Health staff for the placement of inmates into our community treatment programs.

The programs provide weekly individual therapy and special treatment program groups that address substance abuse, anger management, social and independent living skills, medication management, and mental health issues pertinent to each individual. The locked program has a vocational rehabilitation program which allows residents to have paid work experience at the facility and also has a certified chemical dependency counselor employed full time who works individually with the residents who struggle the most with their addictions.

In addition to the treatment components of both facilities, the clients are assisted with obtaining disability benefits and Medi-Cal. This allows for a smooth transition into the community and into a lower level of care. DMH liaisons are located in-house at both facilities to facilitate realistic and comprehensive discharge plans in order to ensure continued community treatment and appropriate placement while continuing to satisfy the courts and the terms set out for the clients' probation requirements.

CO-OCCURRING DISORDERS COURT PROGRAM

The Co-Occurring Disorders Court (CODC) is a specially-designated court program created to rehabilitate criminal defendants experiencing both mental illness and substance disorders. Many of the defendants also experience chronic homelessness. The CODC Program is offered to non-violent criminal defendants with co-occurring mental health and substance addiction disorders who voluntarily agree to participate in a 12 to 18 month comprehensive, court-supervised COD treatment program. Residential and outpatient treatment services are provided by a DMH-contract Full Service Partnership (FSP) provider that has dedicated its 62 FSP slots to the CODC Program, with the initial 90-day residential component of the program taking place at the Antelope Valley Rehabilitation Center in Acton.

The CODC represents a unique partnership between the criminal justice system, the drug treatment community, and the mental health community. Housed in the Criminal Courts Building in Downtown Los Angeles, the CODC began operating as a pilot program in April 2007, and is funded by the County of Los Angeles, Homeless Prevention Initiative, and Mental Health Services Act. Los Angeles County collaborators include DMH, the Superior Court, District Attorney, Public Defender, Alternate Public Defender, Sheriff's Department, Public Health/Substance Abuse Prevention and Control, and the Chief Executive Office/ Countywide Criminal Justice Coordination Committee. Other collaborations include coordinated care planning with Jail Mental Health staff and the CODC FSP provider to facilitate release planning, community reintegration, and continuity of care/medications management in the community, and /or to explore alternative disposition options for our mutual clients. The CODC staff periodically outreaches to prospective CODC clients who are detained at Twin Towers and Century Regional Detention Facility (CRDF) in order to further evaluate or prepare these individuals for entering the CODC Program.

1370.01 PC PROGRAM

In collaboration with the Jail Mental Health Program, the 1370.01 PC Program seeks to expedite stabilization of misdemeanor defendants found incompetent to stand trial under Penal Code 1370.01. The program provides 1370.01 PC defendants direct linkage from the Los Angeles County Mental Health Court/Department 95 to treatment and restoration of competency at either the Misdemeanor Incompetent to Stand Trial (MIST) Program in Jail, or in the community. A key component to the program is the collaboration efforts of the MHCLP Court 95 clinician and the MIST program staff in at the Twin Towers Jail and CRDF. Jail mental health clinicians work with the MIST clients while in custody to restore the client to competency. The JMH clinicians and the MHCLP clinician at Court 95 work closely with each other and communicate on a daily basis about the MIST clients. Monthly reports are submitted to the Court by the JMH clinician on the status of the client. For clients who are out of custody the MHCLP clinician goes into the community to see the clients and works with them on competency training and making sure they are linked mental health services.

AB 109 REVOCATION COURT

Programming associated with re-alignment under Assembly Bill 109 is under the direction of Countywide Resource Management. The Mental Health Court Linkage Program provides a team of 7 clinicians who are field located at the Revocation Court (Department 83). This team is tasked with real time on site screening and level of care recommendation to the court for all individuals appearing in this court who have a mental illness or co-occurring disorder. These efforts are in collaboration with both Jail Mental Health discharge planners and Countywide Resource Management. The staff work closely with the JMH linkage staff to work on discharge plans for the clients. AB 109 staff goes into the jail and meet with the linkage staff to work together for the client and discuss the most appropriate level of care for the client upon discharge.

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES – DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH

Mental Health Services Act Mental Health Court Linkage Program:

Court Liaison Program

The Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (DMH) has been a pioneer in establishing collaborative programs addressing the needs of judicially involved individuals with mental illness across the criminal justice continuum including police, jail, and community programs. However, the needs of persons with mental illness involved in the criminal justice system far exceed the services that are available.

DMH has implemented the Court Liaison Program (CLP) to assist adults (18 years and older) with mental illness who are involved in the criminal justice system. DMH entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Los Angeles County Superior Court Administration in 2009 to establish the parameters of the Program. DMH personnel or Court Liaisons provide outreach, support, advocacy, linkage, family support and interagency collaboration onsite at county courthouses throughout Los Angeles County. Court Liaisons serve as a resource for the court and the community and as a link between the criminal justice system and the mental health system.

The CLP expands upon the philosophy of the collaborative or problem solving court model. Traditionally, specialized problem solving courts (mental health, drug and homeless, etc.) handle a dedicated docket of narrowly defined target populations in a single designated court room. These models have been effective in small counties where the volume of defendants is low. However, in Los Angeles County the traditional specialized mental health court model would serve only a fraction of the 2000 plus incarcerated individuals identified as mentally ill. By contrast, the CLP combines the essence of the collaborative and problem solving models and expands these principles throughout conventional court settings.

Court Liaison Program Goals

- To increase identification of defendants suffering from a mental illness who may also have a co-occurring substance abuse disorder
- Increase access and rapid linkage to services
- Offer defendants and judges alternatives to incarceration.
- Improve quality of life and promote recidivism reduction by connecting judicially involved consumers to “best fit” community based treatment and support services

- Improve coordination, collaboration and continuity of care between DMH and its service providers, the community and the criminal justice system
- Promote understanding of the recovery model and MHSA services within the criminal justice system

Services

Court Liaisons coordinate and integrate services between the courts, Jail Mental Health Services and community based treatment providers with particular focus on balancing the needs of individuals with the expectations of the judicial system. The CLP promotes a team approach to the handling of criminal cases involving defendants with mental illness, focuses on their timely identification and emphasizes prompt return to the community, when appropriate. Each case provides an opportunity to educate personnel in courtrooms about mental illness and treatment services. Thus, the supportive nature and problem solving culture of a mental health court is brought to the criminal justice system as a whole.

Judges are central to the referral process and take a leadership role in seeking cooperation from defense and prosecuting attorneys on each case referred to the Program. Court Liaisons will conduct a needs assessment with the consumer and recommend an appropriate type of service. They will eliminate barriers to receiving treatment and successful reintegration, by collaborating with judges, attorneys, jail mental health staff, probation officers, Sheriff's staff and mental health providers to coordinate referrals and services.

The functions of the Court Liaisons include:

- Outreach to consumers in the criminal justice system
- Conduct an assessment of service needs
- Collaborate with Jail Transition and Linkage staff and System Navigators to develop release plans that are realistic and which take into account court outcomes and court stipulations
- Inform consumers and the court of appropriate treatment options in their Service Area
- Link consumers to treatment programs and expedite mental health referrals
- Provide support to consumers and families throughout the court process
- Refer consumers to alternative sentencing programs when appropriate

The Court Liaison Program model is uniquely suited to the needs of Los Angeles County and is an important part of the continuum of care for incarcerated persons with a mental illness. The Program provides a vital link between jail, court and the community and is part of DMH's system of supports and services offered throughout the criminal justice continuum from arrest to release.