

**To contact the Jail Liaison or
request service from Community
Mental Health's Access Center:**

(616) 393-5681

(616) 494-5508 TTY

1-877-588-4357 toll-free

**For HELPLINE
(24 hour mental health crisis)**

396-HELP (4357)

842-HELP (4357)

1-866-512-4357 (toll-free)

The best diversion programs see detainees as citizens of the community who require a broad array of services, including mental health care, substance disorder treatment, housing, and social services. They recognize that some people come into contact with the criminal justice system as a result of fragmented services, the nature of their illness, and lack of social supports and other resources. They know that people should not be detained in jail simply because they have a mental illness. Only through diversion programs that fix this fragmentation by integrating services and supports, can the unproductive cycle of decompensation, disturbance, and arrest be broken.



The activities and programs of this agency are brought to you by the members of the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners. The Michigan Department of Community Health provides financial support to this agency.



Community Mental Health of Ottawa County has been accredited by CARF for seven of its programs.

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**Creating
alternatives
for people
with mental
illness**

Jail Diversion

Why Diversion from Jail?

Some individuals with mental illnesses must be held in jail because of the seriousness of the offense they commit, and they should receive mental health treatment within the jail. However, many individuals with mental illnesses who have been arrested for less serious, non-violent crimes could be diverted from jail to community-based mental health programs.



More than 16% of jail inmates have a mental illness, according to the United States Department of Justice.

People who receive appropriate mental health treatment in the community usually have a better long-term outcome and less chance of returning to jail for a similar offense.

Also, when individuals with mental illness can be appropriately diverted from the criminal justice system, it helps promote smooth jail operations.

What does “diversion” mean?

The term “diversion” has been used to describe a wide variety of policies and procedures. In general, diversion is thought of as a specific program through which some type of mental health intervention places people with mental illness in the community instead of keeping them in jail.

Individuals with mental illness may be identified for diversion from the criminal justice system at any point, including pre-arrest interventions (before formal charges are brought) and post-arrest interventions (after the individual has been arrested and jailed).

Pre-arrest diversion occurs at the point of contact with law enforcement officers and relies heavily on effective interactions between police and community mental health services. Most diversion efforts in the United States are post-arrest programs, which can take place upon arraignment in the courts or in the jail.

A post-arrest diversion program at either the arraignment courts or the jail is one that **screens** individuals potentially eligible for diversion for the presence of mental illness; **evaluates** their eligibility for diversion; **negotiates** with prosecutors, defense attorneys, community-based mental health providers, and the courts to produce a disposition outside the jail in lieu of prosecution or as a condition of a reduction in charges (whether or not a formal conviction occurs); and **links** individuals to the array of community-based services they require.

What are the key factors for effective post-arrest diversion programs?

Integrating all the services needed at the community level including corrections, the courts, mental health care, substance disorder treatment, and social services (such as housing and Medicaid), with a high level of cooperation among all parties.

Liaisons to bridge the barriers between the mental health and criminal justice systems and to manage the interactions between corrections, mental health, and judicial staff. These individuals need to have the trust and recognition of key players from each of the systems to be able to effectively coordinate the diversion effort.

Early identification of detainees with mental health treatment needs who meet the diversion program’s criteria. This is done through the initial screening and evaluation that takes place in the arraignment court or at the jail. It is important to have aggressive case finding so that people with mental illness are screened in the first 24 to 48 hours of detention.

Case managers who have experience in both the mental health and criminal justice systems and who are culturally and racially similar to the consumers they serve. An effective case management program is one of the most important components of successful diversion. Such a program features a high level of contact between consumers and case managers, in places where consumers live and work, to insure that consumers won’t get “lost” along the way.