

Stronger Behavioral Health Focus in Massachusetts Criminal Justice Reform Could Save State Up to \$300M Annually

(Boston, MA) November 10, 2017 – Over 40 percent of individuals incarcerated in Massachusetts state prisons and jails have been previously diagnosed with a behavioral health condition – 27 percent with a serious mental illness. Programs proven at diverting these individuals from the criminal justice system in the first place and preventing recidivism could save Massachusetts as much as \$300 million, the cost of incarcerating nearly 3,000 prisoners with serious mental illness in state custody.

Such were the implications of a day-long conference that explored best practices from national initiatives and evidence-based programs within Massachusetts. Leaders from law enforcement, state government, healthcare, and criminal justice organizations gathered to hear from local and national experts about specific evidence-based initiatives proven to aid reentry and reduce recidivism for those with behavioral health conditions.

“Mental health and addictions treatments for those incarcerated in our jails and prisons are not reimbursable by Medicaid, meaning 100 percent of the cost is absorbed by the state budget. That is a tremendous burden to be placing on Massachusetts taxpayers,” said Danna Mauch, President and CEO of MAMH. “We have proven community treatment programs that could not only significantly reduce taxpayer burden of incarcerating individuals with behavioral health conditions, but that could improve the lives of those individuals immeasurably and help them become contributing members of our communities. Now we need the investment to expand these services across the Commonwealth.”

“Unfortunately, the criminal justice bill before the legislature does not adequately address the pretrial diversion and community reentry needs of individuals with serious and disabling behavioral health conditions. It’s a missed opportunity for comprehensive reform,” continued Mauch.

The conference was sponsored by the Massachusetts Association for Mental Health (MAMH), Association for Behavioral Healthcare, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation, and the Behavioral Health & Economics Network (BHECON) of the National Council for Behavioral Health.

Among the startling statistics shared at the conference:

Individuals with Behavioral Health Conditions in the Criminal Justice System

- Over 40% of the U.S. prison and jail population has experienced serious psychological distress (SPD) in the past month, compared to just 5% of the non-institutionalized U.S. population
- In 2014, 2,876 Massachusetts state prison inmates had been previously diagnosed with serious mental illness. Of Massachusetts’ inmates with a serious mental illness:
 - 24.6% experience major depressive disorder
 - 3.0% experience schizophrenia
 - 13.9% experience bipolar disorder

- 9.1% experience both major depressive disorder and bipolar disorder
- 0.3% experience both major depressive disorder and schizophrenia
- 2.8% experience major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia
- Individuals with SPD come into contact with the criminal justice system over 2.5 times more frequently than those without SPD.
- The overall annual cost of care for Massachusetts state prison inmates diagnosed with serious mental illness in 2014 was \$323,428,110.

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About the Massachusetts Association for Mental Health

The Massachusetts Association for Mental Health (MAMH) is a private, Boston-based non-profit and a leading voice for the creation of services for people with mental health and substance use conditions. Since 1913, MAMH has worked with individuals with these conditions and their family members or friends to help them access services, whether housing, treatment, education, employment, or health insurance. MAMH advocates for community-based services and treatment for people with behavioral health conditions and engages in educational outreach to the public.

About BHECON: Breaking down policy silos

The Behavioral Health + Economics Network, known as BHECON (pronounced “beacon”) unites diverse stakeholders in a series of forums to examine and advance policy reforms to strengthen states’ behavioral health delivery systems. Led by the National Council for Behavioral Health with our state partners, BHECON participants include individuals and organizations recognized for their commitment to improving lives of people living with serious mental illness and incorporates representatives from the behavioral health, criminal justice, and public safety sectors, along with individuals working in the greater medical field. BHECON has partnered with academic research institutions to provide data and analysis specific to the topics presented at the forums and has curated national data in support of this effort. Learn more at www.BHECON.org.