



A Collective Impact Initiative of Envision 2020 & Auburn Montgomery Outreach



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PRESS RELEASE:

***STEPPING UP* RESOLUTION SIGNED BY RIVER REGION COUNTIES**

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MONTGOMERY, AL – The County Commissioners in Montgomery, Autauga, Elmore and Lowndes counties have unanimously signed a groundbreaking resolution in support of a new national initiative, [*Stepping Up*](#).

Stepping Up is supported by U.S. Department of Justice's (DOJ) Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) and led by the National Association of Counties, the Council of State Governments Justice Center, and the American Psychiatric Association Foundation. *Stepping Up* focuses on a single goal: "to safely reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in the nation's jails". Complex issues, like this one, require multiple solutions, which are being approached by uniting county leaders, state and local policymakers, criminal justice and behavioral health professionals, individuals with mental illnesses, and other stakeholders.

In 2013 the River Region proactively moved to begin addressing challenges to mental healthcare access. Dr. David Satcher, former U.S. Surgeon General, was the keynote speaker for a "kickoff" conference that resulted in creation of the Healthy Minds Network (HMN). Since then the 33-member HMN Leadership Council has moved proactively to improve coordination of care and to

establish the Post-incarceration Case Management Program that is under the auspices of the Montgomery Area Mental Health Authority. The River Region is ideally positioned through the unified work of the Healthy Minds Network, which is a *Collective Impact* initiative spearheaded by Envision 2020 and AUM Outreach. Reducing the number of people with mental illnesses in the River Region’s jails is not just a public safety issue. It is also a taxpayer issue because it will move taxpayer dollars where they will have the greatest impact. And, most important, it’s a human issue; mental illness is the only illness treated as though it were a crime. People who receive the treatment and supports they need are successful in the community. Law enforcement and jail personnel at all levels are essential players in this initiative. It is community safekeeping in action for all citizens.

Stepping Up participants commit to engaging in these six action steps, which are already being undertaken by the Leadership Council of the Healthy Minds Network:

1. **“Convene or draw on a diverse team** of leaders and decision makers from multiple agencies committed to reducing the prevalence of people with mental illnesses in jails.
2. **Identify and assess the mental health needs and recidivism risk factors** for adults entering jails to measure prevalence rates and guide decision making at the system, program, and case levels.
3. **Examine treatment and service capacity** to determine which programs and services are available in the county for people with mental illnesses and co-occurring substance use disorders and identify barriers to change.
4. **Develop a plan** with measurable outcomes that draws on comprehensive jail data and an inventory of available treatment and service options.
5. **Implement research-based approaches** that advance the plan.
6. **Track progress** using data and information systems.”

According to the *Stepping Up* website, “Each year, there are an estimated 2 million people with serious mental illnesses admitted to jails across the nation. That’s equivalent to the populations of Vermont and New Hampshire—combined. Almost three-quarters of these adults also have drug and alcohol use problems. Once incarcerated, individuals with mental illnesses tend to stay longer in jail and upon release are at a higher risk of returning to incarceration than those without these illnesses. The human toll of this problem—and its cost to taxpayers—is staggering. Jails spend two to three times more money on adults with mental illnesses that require intervention than on those without those needs, yet often do not see improvements to public safety or these individuals’ health.”

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