

# NEWS RELEASE

Arizona Supreme Court  
Administrative Office of the Courts



Contact: Aaron Nash  
Phone: 602-452-3656  
Email: [anash@courts.az.gov](mailto:anash@courts.az.gov)

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## **Arizona Courts' Mental Health Project Contributes to National Guide**

PHOENIX – A 2019 report found that the majority of people in local jails suffer from mental illness and the rate of serious mental illness is four to six times higher in jail than in the general population. Statistics like these drove the Arizona court system to address mental health in state courts. Recognizing a national need to address the issue, a joint effort of national organizations adapted Arizona's guide into a step-by-step simple implementation guide for other courts. The National Guide allows courts, particularly counties, to identify local partners in their communities to improve outcomes and, where possible, prevent justice system involvement for those with mental illness.

Time has shown that the complexities of working with people who have mental illness and a co-occurring substance abuse issue can strain the resources of all three branches of government in responding. The State Justice Institute awarded grant funds to study national solutions to these issues. Working with the National Center for State Courts, the Conference of Chief Justices, and the Conference of State Court Administrators, a national guide was produced. *Leading Change: Improving the Court and Community's Response to Mental Health and Co-Occurring Disorders* is a 43-page toolkit for starting a local program, identifying and gathering the necessary partners, implementing the best practices in the guide, and maintaining the approach over time.

Courts, governments, or other agencies looking to implement a program in their community can find the resource online at <https://tinyurl.com/rbh4m5w>. Arizona's report that contributed to the national guide is online at <https://tinyurl.com/uzdtd78>. Arizona's Administrative Office of the Courts will host a Mental Health Summit in March of 2020 to continue these local and national efforts.

# The National Guide for Responding to Mental Illness

Trial courts have increasingly become the default system for addressing the needs of those with mental and behavioral health issues.



**>57%**

of adults with mental illness did not receive mental health treatment in the last year



**64%**

of people in jail suffer from mental illness



**>70%**

of those with serious mental illness also have substance use disorder



**Incarceration negatively affects health outcomes, housing stability, employment, and community integration.**



The rate of serious mental illness is **4 to 6 times** higher in jail than in the general population.



The rate of substance use disorders is **7 times** higher among those in jail than in the general population.

**A robust community response can prevent justice-system involvement, recidivism, and the associated negative outcomes for many individuals with mental health issues.**

From the national guide: *Leading Change: Improving the Court and Community's Response to Mental Health and Co-Occurring Disorders* (2019), a project on behalf of the national initiative to improve the justice system response to mental illness.  
<https://www.ncsc.org/~media/Files/PDF/Topics/Court%20Management/Leading-Change-Guide.pdf>

With participation from the Conference of Chief Justices, Conference of State Court Administrators, National Center for State Courts, and the State Justice Institute. With input from Arizona's Fair Justice Subcommittee on Mental Health and the Criminal Justice System.