



Addressing Mental Health Needs Through Civil Diversion

An evidence-based model for building civil mental health diversion options

The justice system is facing a mental health crisis. Across the country, criminal court dockets are overcrowded with individuals who have underlying mental health conditions, often with limited options to connect people with the specialized care they need. As a result, unmet mental health needs lead to a revolving door of rearrest and incarceration. By offering civil diversion options, jurisdictions can connect individuals to specialized civil justice teams, easing the burden on courts and improving long-term outcomes for individuals with mental health conditions.

The Challenge

Approximately 33% of individuals arrested in the United States—and an even larger percentage of those in jail or prisons—have a mental health condition. Research consistently shows that the most effective strategies for addressing mental health needs in the justice system include early identification of those needs, timely access to evidence-based treatment, and strong partnerships between justice and behavioral health professionals. Too often, however, the justice system struggles to connect defendants with treatment because of long wait times, strict eligibility criteria, and other factors.

The Solution

All Rise's Center for Advancing Justice has pioneered a civil mental health diversion framework that can be customized for any jurisdiction in the country.

Mental health diversion is not a new concept. Programs like mental health courts have been around for decades and have proven that combining behavioral health services with accountability can improve outcomes and save costs. But even the best criminal diversion programs work within the traditional criminal legal system, which can be overburdened and slow.

By contrast, civil mental health diversion programs can quickly identify individuals best served outside the criminal justice system, divert cases away from crowded criminal courts, and connect people to care with treatment and accountability through civil courts. This approach, in turn, frees up resources like competency restoration programs for those who need them most.

Offering civil mental health diversion gives local justice systems the ability to:

- Reduce recidivism among individuals with mental illness
- Ease overcrowding in criminal courts and jails
- Accelerate case processing
- Improve justice system responses through an interdisciplinary team approach

Our Approach

The Center for Advancing Justice has developed the AIRS framework (Assess, Implement, Review, and Sustain) to facilitate our work with local jurisdictions.

Assess: We begin with a comprehensive system assessment to evaluate a jurisdiction's readiness to implement a civil mental health diversion process. Through stakeholder interviews, data analysis, and resource mapping, we help jurisdictions understand current case processes and the potential impact of offering this new diversion approach.

Implement: Next, we work alongside local leaders to craft a jurisdiction-specific implementation plan that leverages existing resources and partnerships. We help develop policies and procedures, train program team members, create communication plans to facilitate interagency information sharing, and develop referral pathways to rapidly connect defendants to services.

Review: As jurisdictions begin to implement civil mental health diversion processes, we provide real-time support to help evaluate impact, gather feedback, and make necessary adjustments.

Sustain: To ensure that changes last beyond the initial implementation period, we support sustainability planning, including long-term funding strategies, staff training plans, cross-system coordination protocols, and the identification of internal champions who will lead ongoing efforts to support system goals.

Why partner with the Center for Advancing Justice?

Our mission is to advance effective interventions for individuals impacted by substance use and mental health challenges at every stage of the justice system, from first contact with law enforcement to corrections and community reentry. We have the expertise and experience required to develop trusted, pragmatic solutions to meet your unique needs.

Experts in implementation science: Our team brings a deep understanding of how to translate best practices into real-world, sustainable actions to improve outcomes.

Driven by results: We deploy proven strategies for success and rely on data to tell us what's working and what's not.

Customized, ongoing support: Our process is collaborative and adapted to your local community, capacity, and statutory requirements.

Let's Get Started

Whether you're just beginning to explore civil mental health diversion or looking to strengthen and create efficiencies in existing practices, we can help. Contact us today to start the conversation!



Contact us for a custom proposal! Scan the QR code or visit allrise.org/caj

