

## PRESS RELEASE

August 6, 2014

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### **New CPPP report recommends mental health peer support services to reduce cost, recidivism in Texas county jails**

*Texas has a unique opportunity to help inmates with mental illness transition back into the community, save money, and be a national innovator*

AUSTIN, TEXAS—A new policy report by the Center for Public Policy Priorities shows how correctional facilities in Texas can reduce costs and recidivism rates by implementing an innovative peer support program in local jails.

Texas correctional facilities have become today's de facto treatment providers for individuals with mental illness. Incarceration of an individual with mental illness in a Texas prison or local jail costs, on average, anywhere from \$42 to \$138 per day per inmate, while providing community-based mental health services costs only \$12 per day per client. With up to 40 percent of Texas jail bookings in 2013 involving individuals who have previously received public mental health services, CPPP's report *From Recidivism to Recovery: The Case for Peer Support in Texas Correctional Facilities* shows Texas stands to save.

"Incarcerating, rather than treating, people with mental illness comes at a high fiscal and human cost," said Katharine Ligon, mental health policy analyst at the Center for Public Policy Priorities. "By countering the typically punitive criminal justice framework with the recovery-focused principles of hope, wellness, and personal responsibility, we can improve quality of life and save money for local and state budgets."

Mental health peer support is a cost-effective, evidence-based practice in which an individual with a lived experience of mental illness provides guidance and mentorship to another individual with lived experience. Successful peer support programs across the country have spurred a growing interest in bringing the clinical and social benefits of peer support to the criminal justice system. Using data from a successful peer support re-entry program in Pennsylvania, the report recommends Texas implement a pilot project at the local jail level with a focus on inmates with mental health needs who are re-entering the community. *From Recidivism to Recovery* also includes policy recommendations to improve access to mental health services, ease re-entry transitions for inmates with mental illness, and enhance the viability of peer support re-entry programming.

"It is our hope this paper will initiate a conversation and action about the steps Texas must take to integrate recovery into the criminal justice system," Ligon said. "There is an opportunity to close the revolving door for individuals with mental illness cycling in and out of jail by ensuring that they are connected with community-based mental health care."

Texas already has a Certified Peer Specialist training and certification program that has helped state hospitals and Community Mental Health Centers successfully use peer support services in their facilities and continue to grow their peer support specialist workforce. Incorporating peer support into the criminal justice system will require collaboration and partnership across public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

"Texas inmates with mental illness are more likely to return to jail or prison," said Ligon. "We have a unique opportunity to change the landscape of the criminal justice system in Texas."

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