

# Justice and Mental Health Initiative

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act

“My job is to get everybody in the same room as we confront mental illness, the homeless, and make sure there is a better alternative to these people’s lives than jail. I believe the savings, both in money and in people, will be incredible... I’d much rather build schools than jails.”

Jim Hammond,  
Hamilton County Sheriff

“Incarcerating people with mental illness isn’t just costly and ineffective, it’s inhumane and unjust.”

Judge Don Poole,  
Hamilton County Mental  
Health Court

“Super-users” with complex medical needs make up a small fraction of U.S. patients, but they account for half of the nation’s overall health-care spending.

*The Atlantic*  
June 29, 2017

*Hamilton County and a group of local stakeholders have joined the nationwide effort to reduce the number of people with mental illness in county jails.*

## 2017 Accomplishments

The Hamilton County Sheriff’s Office launched a “frequent user” pilot project to secure permanent housing and support services for 50 homeless, mentally ill individuals who cycle repeatedly through local jails, hospitals and other public systems. The founding partners named below and private citizens have joined the effort, contributing \$125,000 in seed funding:

- BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee
- CHI Memorial
- City of Chattanooga
- Hamilton County Government

The Corporation for Supportive Housing was engaged to provide technical assistance throughout the project. CSH is a national leader in helping communities create housing with services for special needs populations.

## Challenges

Data sharing across user systems – HIPAA ‘fear factor’ slows the process

Mental Health funding is declining but the need for care is not. Medicaid dollars for intensive support services for these frequent users is not currently available in Hamilton County

Affordable housing is difficult to obtain, especially for individuals who are mentally ill. The AIM Center, as an example, owns and manages housing for this population, and currently has a two year waiting list.

## Federal Support

Jails, prisons and psychiatric hospitals are not the answer for people with mental illness. Federal resources should be targeted at community-based care to produce better outcomes over time at a reduced cost.

Ensure housing and support resources are available for vulnerable, high-needs populations such as frequent users who are chronically homeless or who have severe and persistent mental illness.

Revise/clarify federal privacy laws to enable data sharing among hospitals, the judicial system, law enforcement, mental health providers and other agencies to improve individual outcomes, streamline resources, identify trends and to monitor performance.

Provide briefings and updates on the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act to better understand how aspects of the law apply to this initiative.