

Peer Re-entry Services



Many justice-involved people with behavioral health conditions experience challenges in accessing appropriate and timely care upon return to the community. Common challenges include limited access to health care while incarcerated, inadequate insurance coverage, and the stigma associated with justice involvement, mental illness, and substance use.ⁱ In recognition of the

challenges people with behavioral health concerns exiting the justice system experience, the Texas Legislature required the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to establish the *Mental Health Peer Support Re-entry Program* during the 84th Legislative Session (2015).

Three Local Mental Health Authorities (LMHAs) were selected to participate in the program: The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD, My Health My Resources (MHMR) of Tarrant County, and Tropical Texas Behavioral Health. At participating LMHAs, certified Peer Support Specialists build relationships with program participants by providing “in-reach” services prior to jail release. Peers employed by the program also assist formerly incarcerated people with behavioral health conditions access clinical and other community-based services upon release.

According to Cameron County Sheriff Omar Lucio, roughly 30 to 40 percent of inmates in Cameron County have a mental health condition.ⁱⁱ The Mental Health Peer Re-entry program at Tropical Texas Behavioral Health connects some of these inmates with other people with mental health conditions who have achieved recovery.

Between 2016 and 2020, the Mental Health Peer Support Re-entry Program has served 390 justice-involved people with behavioral health conditions ranging from 18 to 68 years of age.ⁱⁱⁱ Collectively, the three LMHAs have served 254 males and 136 females. Approximately 79% of program participants, or 307 people, identify as black or Hispanic. Of those served by the program, Bipolar I Disorder is the most prevalent diagnosis followed by Schizophrenia. A comparison of Adult Needs and Strength Assessments (ANSAs) conducted prior to program enrollment and after receipt of peer services indicate that program participants experienced significant clinical improvements in the following areas:

- Arrests;
- peer influence;
- employment; and
- criminal behavior.

As indicated in the report submitted to the Legislature in compliance with the 2020-2021 General Appropriations Act, Senate Bill 1, 86th Legislature, Regular Session, 2019, the *Mental Health Peer Support Re-entry Program* “demonstrates that peer supported re-entry is helpful for formerly incarcerated participants as they re-enter the community.”

Resources:

- [Report on the Mental Health Peer Support Re-entry Program](#), Texas Health and Human Services Commission
- [Evaluation of DSHS Re-entry Project \(Rider 73\)](#), Hogg Foundation for Mental Health
- [Peers in Courts](#), National Judicial Task Force to Examine State Courts’ Response to Mental Illness

ⁱ [Prison And Jail Reentry And Health | Health Affairs](#)

ⁱⁱ [Cameron County partners with Tropical Texas for new ‘peer re-entry’ mental health program | KVEO-TV \(valleycentral.com\)](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [Legislative Report on the Mental Health Peer Support Re-entry Program 2020 \(texas.gov\)](#)