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**Lucas County Named Stepping Up Innovator County for Efforts to Collect
Accurate Data on People in Jails Who Have Mental Illnesses**

TOLEDO, OH — Lucas County was named as one of a select group of Stepping Up Innovator Counties in the United States for its expertise in reducing the prevalence of individuals suffering from mental illness in its jail and collecting baseline data on the number of people in its jail who have mental illnesses.

The Stepping Up initiative was launched in May 2015 by the National Association of Counties (NACO), The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center and the American Psychiatric Association (APA) Foundation to mobilize local, state and national leaders to achieve a measurable reduction in the number of people in jail who have mental illnesses.

Since that time, more than 475 counties, including Lucas County, in 43 states representing 45 percent of the U.S. population, have committed to the Stepping Up goal.

“We are proud Lucas County is the second county in the state of Ohio to achieve Stepping Up Innovator County status in recognition of our efforts in establishing baseline data to track the number of people with serious mental illness in jail,” **Commissioner Gary L. Byers** said. “By implementing cutting edge strategies that are part of the Stepping Up initiative, Lucas County is taking important steps to reduce incarceration rates among those with mental illness.”

Since joining the National Stepping Up Initiative in May 2016, Lucas County and has taken significant steps toward reducing the number of people in jail who have mental illnesses, including:

1. Establishing a Behavioral Health Criminal Justice Coordinator position to lead the efforts and improve outcomes for constituents who find themselves within the intersection of the behavioral health and criminal justice systems.
2. Implementing an evidence-based mental health screen in the Lucas County Jail.
3. The development of the Crisis Access Recovery Engagement (CARE) Center, housed at Zepf Center, which serves as an alternative to jail for individuals suffering from Mental Illness and/or Substance Use Disorders.

4. Expansion of access to mental health and/or substance use disorder services for individuals who are incarcerated in the Lucas County Jail, including reentry services, clinical service support, group therapies and medication management.

Lucas County is now part of a select group chosen as Innovator Counties for implementing Stepping Up's suggested three-step approach to collect and analyze timely data on the prevalence of people in their jails who have serious mental illnesses (SMI). These steps include establishing a shared SMI definition for their Stepping Up efforts across criminal justice and behavioral health systems, ensuring everyone booked into jail is screened for mental illnesses, and regular reporting on this population.

"Through our collaboration with our partners, the Mental Health and Recovery Services Board and the Zepf Center, we are making changes and adopting innovative ways to increase connections to community-based treatment for people with mental illness. This is a key step in our comprehensive plan to overhaul responses to people with mental illness who are cycling through the criminal justice system," **Commissioner Tina Skeldon Wozniak** said.

As an Innovator County, Lucas County will help other counties improve their data collection and reduction in those suffering from mental illness in the jail efforts by participating in training sessions, taking part in presentations, sharing information and its experiences through the Stepping Up network, and more.

"As an Innovator County, we are being recognized for our leadership in understanding the prevalence of people with mental illness coming into our jail. Our partnership with the Criminal Justice Coordinating System to implement cross-system data has been critical to understand what is happening in our jails and to begin an actual reduction in the number of people in jails who are suffering from mental illness," **Commissioner Pete Gerken** said.

Major Achievements in Lucas County:

2017

- Establishing the position of a Behavioral Health/ Criminal Justice (BHCJ) Coordinator to analyze, research, develop, plan, implement, and evaluate activities that support system improvements for the intersection of the Lucas County behavioral health and criminal justice systems.

2018

- Facilitating a BHCJ Committee focused on the intersection of the criminal justice and behavioral health systems with adequate and appropriate representation from each system to include the County Commissioners Office, City of Toledo, Lucas County Sheriff's Office, Toledo Police Department, suburban law enforcement, Lucas County Common Pleas Court, Toledo Municipal Court, Suburban Courts, Lucas County Prosecutor's Office, Toledo Legal Aid Society, Lucas County Mental Health and Recovery Services Board, addiction service providers, mental health service providers, developmental disabilities service providers, and reentry service providers.

2019

- Successfully implemented the Brief Jail Mental Health Screening (BJMHS) Tool in the Lucas County Corrections Center. This screening tool provides information on the individuals in the jail who are suffering from serious and persistent mental illness. Every individual who is being booked into the jail is required to complete a BJMHS. This tool was the first step in achieving cross-systems data sharing.

2021

- Unison Health received a \$3.6 million grant through SAMSHA to expand access to mental health and/or substance use disorder services to individuals inside the local jail.

2022

- Unison Health began providing services inside the Lucas County Jail on January 3. Unison is providing support for jail initiatives including reentry services, clinical service support, group and individual therapies, telehealth services, coordination with current community providers, and medication management. Furthermore, Unison established partnerships between other behavioral health providers in the community to maintain clinical treatment while individuals are incarcerated. The goal is to ensure that clinical service for individuals incarcerated and diagnosed with mental illness and or substance use disorder are able to continue to access services while in jail and that newly diagnosed individuals can be offered the full continuum of treatment options.
- Planning for the development of the CARE Center began in the fall of 2021 to provide services to individuals referred by local law enforcement. This Center is an alternative option to incarceration that will significantly decrease the number of individuals suffering from mental illness and/or substance use disorder from entering the criminal justice system. Participation in the services provided by the CARE Center are voluntary. Once an individual agrees to participate they may stay up to 23 hours at which point they will be referred and/or transferred to additional mental health, alcohol and or drug treatment services either at the Zepf Center or one of the other Community Mental Health Centers. The CARE Center launched on January 31, 2022 with the goal of lowering recidivism rates and decreasing the percentage of individuals in the jail who are suffering from behavioral health challenges.

Reducing recidivism rates in Lucas county is vital. Not only can it cut criminal justice system costs, but it can provide effective treatment for individuals who are suffering with mental health and substance use needs that cycle in and out of the system. As the Lucas County Commissioners move toward the planning and construction of a new corrections center, thinking about services within the facility and how to better serve the population of individuals suffering from mental illness is a top priority.

Innovator Counties range in size and geographic location, from rural Pacific County, Wash., which has a population of 22,000, to urban Miami-Dade County, Fla., with a population of 2.6 million. To see a list of all Innovator Counties and find out more about Stepping Up, visit stepuptogether.org.

ABOUT THE STEPPING UP INITIATIVE

Stepping Up is a national initiative to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in jails. The initiative—a collaboration between The Council of State Governments Justice Center, the National Association of Counties and the American Psychiatric Association Foundation—asks communities to come together to develop an action plan that can be used to achieve measurable impact in local criminal justice systems of all sizes across the country. For more information visit <https://stepuptogether.org>.