

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING PROJECT SUMMARY

- As found by two recent legislative task forces, law enforcement agencies encountering persons with mental health disorders in crisis often have no alternative other than arresting and taking the individual to jail in order to address the safety of the individual or the community.
- This consumes millions of dollars in police, judicial and correctional resources, clogging the court system, taking police resources away from serious criminal activity, overcrowding the jail, and taxing other emergent community resources.
- On an individual level, the arrest and detention of a person with a mental illness can be a re-traumatizing and destabilizing event disrupting service systems and potentially exacerbating the crisis.
- The percentage of identified persons in the MDC with mental illness ranges from 40 to 50%. MDC does not track homelessness, but nationally the connection between homelessness, mental illness and incarceration has been well established.
- The need for housing with associated supportive services has been consistently recognized both locally and nationally as a critical need in serving homeless or precariously housed individuals with behavioral health needs. The lack of sufficient supportive housing in Albuquerque has been consistently documented through the Albuquerque Continuum of Care process.
- The unmet needs of persons in the criminal justice system has also been consistently identified locally and nationally. A New Mexico statewide report found that individuals cycling through the criminal justice system have been particularly difficult to serve in part due to the inadequate transition process from jail and the lack of services designed for the unique needs of individuals with legal constraints, family reunification issues, and specialized housing and employment needs.
- When in the community, these individuals frequently decompensate quickly and are often not encountered until they reach a crisis level. At that point, their acute condition prevents them from entering existing supportive housing programs.
- At this time, because of the lack of a crisis triage and stabilization facility (which is also being pursued through a separate process), the jail serves that function making release from jail, when the individual has been stabilized, an opportune time to reach this population. For this reason, this initiative focuses on that transition as the entry point into services.
- This program would serve individuals who are homeless or precariously housed, have a mental health disorder, a substance addiction, co-occurring disorders, cognitive impairments, are medically vulnerable or are otherwise in need of intensive supportive services and who are involved in the criminal justice system. These individuals could be pretrial, sentenced, or on probation and would be supervised by the appropriate criminal justice supervision agency.
- This plan has been developed through 8 months of planning between the County Public Safety Division and the City Health and Human Services Division. The plan is for the City and County to jointly fund the program. The City has expressed strong support for the program but will not have it on the Council agenda until August. County funding is sought to begin the program so that the infrastructure is in place and people can begin to be diverted from the jail and receive the services they need in the community.

- A Bureau of Justice Assistance grant for \$300,000 for two years has been applied for to provide additional funds for this project. It is also expected that Medicaid will be available to cover some of the wrap around services to be provided in this project.
- A Project Coordinator would be employed by the County to assist in identifying appropriate candidates for the program in the jail and serve as the liaison with the criminal justice system in order to facilitate use of this alternative to incarceration. As determined by the court and the legal status of the individual, the person would continue under court supervision.
- The agencies providing the services in this program would be selected through an RFP process open to all community providers. The County Coordinator would oversee the provision of services under the resulting contracts.
- The project would fund the necessary housing units and supportive services. Frequently, the individuals to be served have not achieved or maintained stability in community based programs because the services have not had the intensity or the breadth required by them or those services have been provided in the absence of stable housing. This program provides housing and a high level of intensity including a case management ratio of 10-15 clients to one case manager. This level of intense service is not supported by current funding streams although it is intended that available funding streams such as Medicaid will supplement the local funding.
- Another barrier to this population maintaining stability in the community has been restrictions on the length of services, particularly, those providing housing. Although this is often for the purpose of serving more individuals, the result is counterproductive in that those individuals then decompensate and present again when in crisis. This program design continues to serve individuals until they are able to obtain their own housing through self-sufficiency or public housing vouchers at which time they would transition to other supportive services as well.
- The services expected to be provided are extensive and consistent with best practices. The providers will be expected to provide in-reach (services in the jail), assessment and acceptance in the jail, discharge planning, continuity of treatment, coordination and support for criminal justice requirements, and wrap around services in the community. Wrap around services include case management, vocational assistance, life skills education, assistance accessing public benefits, counseling, access to psychiatry and medical care, housing support, and transition planning when exiting the program.
- System and individual data collection and outcome evaluation would be an integral part of the program to measure effectiveness and system savings.