11 ideas to fix Pa.'s broken mental health care system

Pennsylvania’s jails and prisons were never designed to house people with serious mental illnesses but today they make up an estimated 10 percent of its correctional population which explored the myriad difficulties that people with mental illnesses face in getting help in Pennsylvania and how, without that help, they too often end up committing petty offenses that lead them to arrest and incarceration.

In this final piece in its series, PennLive presents 11 potential solutions to that problem, from increasing state hospital beds to changes in how Pennsylvania divvies up mental health care funding.

These solutions were suggested by the scores of academics, mental health advocates, correctional officials, police, homeless shelter workers and mental health workers that PennLive interviewed for its series.

Many of their ideas would require extra state funding, some would require law changes, and some solutions are supported by certain advocates and not others – like increasing the number of beds in Pennsylvania’s state hospitals.

If you like an idea, click on the button next to it. At the end of this article you can type in your name and your zip code, and an email will automatically be sent to your state representative encouraging them to support the policies that you support.

If there’s a proposal that you support that wasn’t included in the list below, please post it in the comments.
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<th><strong>Easy</strong> (small funding, legal, or administrative changes)</th>
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| 1. **Centralize mental health administration** | Consolidate mental health services under the Department of Human Services.  
[Read more](#) |
| 2. **Suspend, don't terminate, Medicaid benefits** | Change administrative rules to suspend Medicaid benefits for pre-trial detainees rather than terminate them.  
[Read more](#) |
| 3. **Fund public awareness campaigns** | Increase public awareness campaigns about mental illness.  
[Read more](#) |
| 4. **Commission report on state hospital beds** | Assess how many psychiatric inpatient beds Pennsylvania needs.  
[Read more](#) |
| **Medium** (larger funding or legal changes) |  |
| 5. **Broaden involuntary commitment criteria** | Broaden commitment criteria to make it easier to involuntarily commit seriously mentally ill people.  
[Read more](#) |
| 6. **Expand assisted outpatient treatment (AOT)** | Legally mandate certain at-risk mentally ill people to get treatment while living in the community.  
[Read more](#) |
| 7. **Restore cuts to community mental health programs** | Restore funding for community mental health services to pre-2012 levels.  
[Read more](#) |
| 8. **Bolster community mental health funding** | Increase funding for community mental health services.  
[Read more](#) |
| 9. **Expand mental health courts** | Provide incentives for counties to establish mental health courts.  
[Read more](#) |
| 10. **Increase state hospital beds** | Expand Pennsylvania’s psychiatric inpatient hospital beds.  
[Read more](#) |
Hard (major reforms)

11. Install universal health care

Establish a universal health care system in Pennsylvania.

Read more

Please pick at least one choice from above to send an email.

Tell your state representative to take action:

Fill out the details below and we will auto-generate an email urging your local state representative to support the policies you selected above.

My name: *

My email: *

Now, help us find your legislator.

Type in your Pennsylvania zip code and we'll fill out the rest (note, some zip codes contain multiple legislative districts. In those few cases, we defaulted to a single district):

My zip code: *

District number: *

County: *

Town: *

Legislator email: *

Legislator: *
Here's a preview of your email:

Dear [YOUR REPRESENTATIVE'S NAME WILL APPEAR HERE]

As a constituent of your district, I am emailing you to express my concern at the number of people with serious mental illnesses who are incarcerated in Pennsylvania.

As highlighted in PennLive's year-long series, From Patients to Prisoners, an estimated 10 percent of the 87,000 inmates in our state and county prisons had a serious mental illness on an average day in 2014. This policy is both cruel to those individuals and needlessly costly to taxpayers.

To address this problem, I urge you to pursue legislation or advocate for the following actions;

[THE IDEAS YOU SELECTED ABOVE WILL APPEAR HERE]

Thank you for taking the time to read this email.

You can read more about this proposal, and other potential solutions to improve Pennsylvania's mental health care system, in this PennLive article.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME WILL APPEAR HERE]