

Renewed Reflections



Is it a Crime to Lose Your Mind?

The percentage of women in the U.S. who are incarcerated and have reported experiencing a mental health condition is more than 50%.

It's important that society comes up with a solution to manage this healthcare crisis. Should individuals suffering from a mental health issue be punished by the criminal justice system, or given access to effective resources to mitigate them committing a crime

In this issue, we will highlight an organization whose mission is to prevent the suffering and harm caused by failing to treat severe mental illness and to give all people whose lives are affected by it the chance to thrive. The Treatment Advocacy Center, is a nonprofit organization that was founded in 1988 by Dr. E. Fuller Torrey. Dr. Torrey initiated advocacy to reform state laws as it was necessary to make it possible to treat people before illness caused them to fall into homelessness or incarceration, or to become dangerous to themselves or to others.



**Treatment
Advocacy
Center**

The information below was taken directly from the Treatment Advocacy Center website. To learn and support go to <https://www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org/>

Treatment Advocacy Center pushes for reform of how we as a society serve people with severe mental illness (SMI). With the unique needs of those with the most serious illnesses always in mind, we approach systemic change through state and federal legislative advocacy; policy research; implementation of lifesaving assisted outpatient treatment (AOT)

programs; and engagement with the media on the realities of SMI in our country, all in order to ensure that we make informed decisions. People's lives depend on it..

Treatment Advocacy Center (TAC) uses "SMI" to stand for **severe mental illness**, an umbrella term that includes the most serious of psychiatric disorders that puts an individual at greatest risk for anosognosia, having their mental illness criminalized, or experiencing a preventable tragedy such as victimization or suicide. This includes schizophrenia spectrum disorders, severe bipolar disorder, and major depression with psychotic features.

8.9

million adults in the United States with SMI.

3.7

million adults 18-65 living with a schizophrenia spectrum disorder.

1.5 %

of adults have Bipolar I disorder in past year.

42 %

of individuals with SMI receive treatment in a given year.

How is mental illness criminalized?

People with SMI get wrapped up into the criminal-legal system in a variety of ways. Once an individual becomes involved with the criminal-legal system, it can become difficult for them to escape.

Untreated symptoms

Some symptoms of mental illness may contribute to an individual behaving erratically, such as yelling at strangers, trespassing, or sleeping in public areas. Any of these actions can end in arrest.

"Compassionate arrests" or "mercy bookings"

Some law enforcement officers may arrest individuals they perceive to be in psychological distress in order to ensure they are housed and fed.

Lack of state psychiatric beds

Without access to inpatient treatment when needed, individuals with SMI deteriorate further in the community and are more likely to encounter law enforcement. In some areas, jail may be the only place that an individual receives any mental health treatment.

Outdated commitment laws

Statutes that require that the individual present an imminent danger to self or others before the state can intervene all but guarantees an interaction with law enforcement.

Substance use

People with SMI have a higher rate of substance use. This puts them more at risk for criminal-legal encounters.

Recommended Reading

Out of the Shadows: Confronting America's Mental Illness Crisis

By Dr. E. Fuller Torrey

Torrey begins by examining the consequences of our current mental illness policies on homelessness, our penal system, and the spread of violence in America. He then explores the economic, ideological, and legal reasons why, even though billions of tax dollars are spent each year on the mentally ill, they continue to receive less-than-adequate care. And finally, he proposes a 3-phase approach to correcting the situation.

[The book is intended for] healers, policymakers, and the millions of families whose lives have been touched by serious mental illness. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2016 APA, all rights reserved)

May is Mental Health Awareness Month

Follow the following websites for up to date information regarding Mental Health throughout the month of May

National Alliance on Mental Illness NAMI <https://www.nami.org>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
SAMHSA <https://www.samhsa.gov>

Mental Health America MHA <https://www.mhanational.org>
