

Modern Responses to Mental Illness

Thousands of severely mentally ill Americans are falling through the cracks of our broken mental healthcare system. The failure to focus on treatment outcomes for the severely mentally ill has created a national crisis with devastating consequences:



15% of the total prison population has severe mental illness (SMI)—approximately 10 times the rate in the general population.



The homeless population with SMI **doubled from 60,000 in 1984 to more than 137,000 in 2023.**



More than \$15 billion annually is spent on incarcerating people with SMI while sidestepping medical care.



\$6.62 billion is spent annually on emergency hospitalization boarding that is ill-equipped to treat SMI.

Current legal definitions of what constitutes an immediate threat of “dangerousness” to oneself or others. is inconsistent and lacking in specificity—making involuntary commitment tricky or impossible.



THE SOLUTION

Expand Civil Commitment Powers

Broaden the legal definition of “dangerousness” beyond imminent harm to include:

- Long-term physical and psychiatric deterioration.
- Risk of chronic homelessness or exploitation.
- Pattern of hospitalizations or incarcerations due to untreated illness.
- Substance abuse and addiction complications.

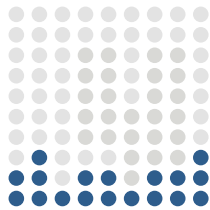
Reorganize Disability Rights Groups

Reform Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness (PAIMI) advocacy organizations to add oversight and outcomes reporting.

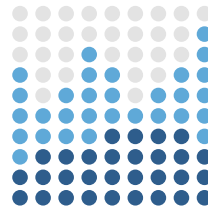
Increase Psychiatric Bed Capacity

Build infrastructure to increase capacity from the current national average of

**18 beds per
100,000
residents**



to the optimal
range of



**30-60 beds
per 100,000
residents**

WHY IT MATTERS

Failure to treat patients with SMI undermines the basic tenets of medical care to “do no harm” and puts lives in danger.

THE BOTTOM LINE:

Reforming civil commitment laws, reorganizing advocacy groups, and expanding psychiatric bed capacity will focus treatment on solutions that save patient lives, protect families, reduce homelessness, and improve public safety.