



The Promise of Measure 57 Coalition

Individuals and Organizations Working Together to Find a Better Way to Fight Crime

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Harvard study: Under-treatment of mental illness contributes to crime

Two thirds of prisoners nationwide with a mental illness were off treatment at the time of their arrest, according to a new study by Harvard researchers that suggests **under-treatment of mental illness contributes to crime and incarceration.**

The study, published today online in the American Journal of Public Health, found that about **a quarter of inmates nationwide had a history of chronic mental illnesses like schizophrenia, bipolar illness and depression.** Researchers analyzed data collected in 2002 and 2004 from local, state and federal correctional facilities.

While only one in three were taking medications for their illness at the time of their arrest, that number jumped to nearly two-thirds during incarceration, the researchers found

"For many of them, **treatment of their mental illness before their arrest might have prevented criminality and the staggering human and financial costs of incarceration,**" said study author Dr. Steffie Woolhandler, an associate professor of medicine at Harvard and a primary care physician at the Cambridge Health Alliance's Cambridge Hospital campus.

Woolhandler said the findings portend significant problems for Massachusetts, where the Department of Mental Health last week laid off about 100 case managers -- nearly one quarter of the staffers who supervise people with severe mental illness and make sure they get the services they need.

State officials said about 3,000 clients would lose their current case managers. The layoffs were in response to the state's economic crisis.

"You are going to pay a much higher cost in the future prosecuting these people and putting them in jail, where they have a right to treatment," Woolhandler said. "I don't know how good a treatment it is, but **the taxpayers end up paying.**"

Association of Oregon
Community Mental
Health Programs

Human Services
Coalition of Oregon

Juvenile Rights Project

National Association of
Social Workers,
Oregon Chapter

Oregon Business
Association

Oregon Criminal
Defense Lawyers
Association

Oregon Education
Association

Oregon Prevention
Education & Recovery
Association

Partnership for Safety
and Justice

SEIU, Local 503

Self Enhancement, Inc.

Stand for Children