



Mental Health Courts in PA

What are Mental Health Courts?

Mental Health Courts partner key justice system officials and mental health professionals in an attempt to divert individuals with serious mental illness out of the criminal justice system by using community-based treatment and supervision in lieu of incarceration. This typically involves court supervised mental health community-based treatment and Mental Health Court Supervision. This supervision includes assessing service needs and monitoring offender compliance with court assigned services and participation in treatment/supervision plans. Depending on the county, some offenders may enter Mental Health Court through either pre-trial diversion or post-sentence.



Who is eligible?

Eligibility requirements vary from county to county. Some counties only include certain mental health diagnoses, such as schizophrenia or major mood disorder, while other counties include more diagnoses. Certain crimes, such as homicide and other violent offenses may make an offender ineligible for Mental Health Court regardless of diagnosis.

How is someone referred?

Individuals with a serious mental illness can be referred to Mental Health Court by a police officer, probation/parole officer, District Magistrate, attorney, prison staff, family member or other agency or individual who knows the offender. A referral is made to Mental Health Court when it is believed to be appropriate based on the nature of the crime, the individual's diagnosis, input from the victim and prior criminal history. Following a referral, the Mental Health Coordinator will review the referral and determine if the individual meets the initial criteria to participate in Mental Health Court. If the Mental Health Coordinator believes the offender is a good fit for the program, the application, completed by Mental Health Court staff, is typically forwarded to the District Attorney who will make a final determination based on the nature of the charges, prior history, and input from the victim.

What are the goals of Mental Health Courts?

The goal of successfully completed Mental Health Court is to increase the likelihood the offender will not engage in any further criminal activity, incur new charges and be successfully discharged from Mental Health Court. In some instances, the original charges may be reduced or dismissed, depending on the nature of the charges and the agreement set forth at the beginning of an individual's participation in Mental Health Court.

What are the expectations?

Most offenders in Mental Health Court will be assigned a county mental health case manager and a specialized probation officer. Both work together to assess the individual's service needs, treatment, community resources and to monitor supervision compliance. The offender must comply with all the court ordered treatment and supervision plans, follow all rules and requirements as established by the court, not engage in any further criminal activity, and complete all treatment goals before they are discharged from court ordered supervision. Some examples include: participating in and completing outpatient counseling, submitting to random drug and alcohol testing, appearing in court as scheduled, and refraining from further criminal activity. If violations occur, sanctions will be imposed, and the offender may lose the ability to remain in the Mental Health Court program. If a violation occurs, there is also the possibility of incarceration pending the nature and number of violations.

For more information visit: <https://www.pacourts.us/judicial-administration/court-programs/mental-health-courts>



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The ASERT Collaborative is funded by the Office of Developmental Programs, PA Department of Human Services.