

# The Intersection of Public Health and Public Safety: Implications for Homelessness

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# Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian



## Professional

- President of Major County Sheriffs of America, *2020-2022*
- President of Massachusetts Sheriffs' Association, *2017-2020*
- Sheriff of Middlesex County, *2011-Present*
- State Representative, *1997-2011*
- Defense Attorney, *1995-1997*
- Prosecutor, *1991-1995*
- Adjunct Professor, *1994-Present*
  - Bentley University, Boston University, Harvard School of Public Health, Mass School of Law, Northeastern University, UMass Lowell
- Prosecutor, *1991-1995*

## Education

- Harvard Kennedy School of Government, *MPA*
- New England Law School, *JD*
- Bridgewater State College, *BS*





# Homelessness – A Community Issue

## More than just encampments

- Homelessness in US rose 18.1% between 2023 and 2024

## Massachusetts

- Homeless population increased by 53% in 2024
- Nearly three times the national rate

## Boston Annual Homelessness Census

- 3,720 families – 9% increase from 2023
- 2,036 individuals – 12% increase from 2023

**A clear link between homelessness and criminal justice involvement**



# Sheriffs: The Intersection of Public Health, Public Safety and Homelessness

**Our population is uniquely at risk for homelessness**

**3 biggest mental health treatment facilities in the US are jails**

- LA County, Cook County, Rikers

**Nationwide, jails see about 7 million releases each year**

- Our clients are the same as yours

**Sheriffs are able to address 4 tipping points to homelessness**

- Incarceration
- Substance Abuse / Mental Health
- Estrangement from family / support networks
- Financial strain



# What is a Sheriff / Middlesex Sheriff's Office

**Established in 1692**

**Care, custody, and control of pre-trial detainees and sentenced inmates**

**700 employees**

- Correction Officers
- Health professionals
- Case Managers

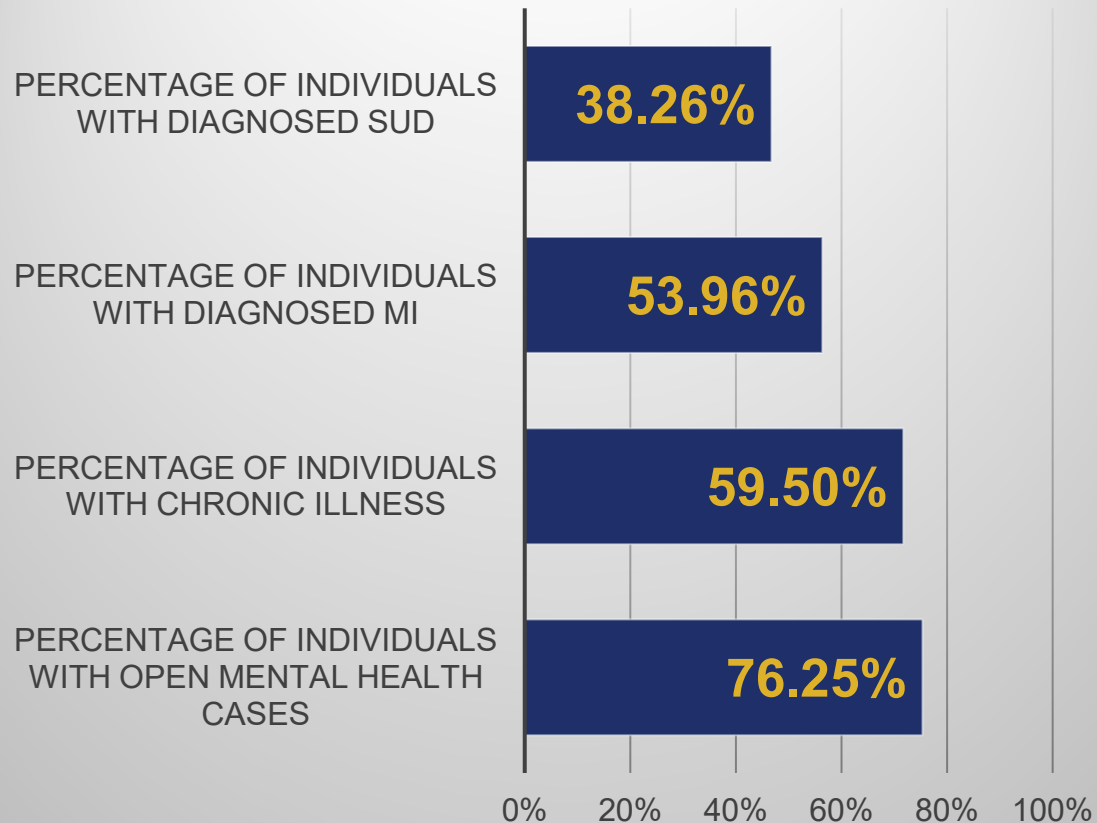
**Defined as a Major County and Large Jail**

- 3,038 admissions last year
- 2,936 releases last year

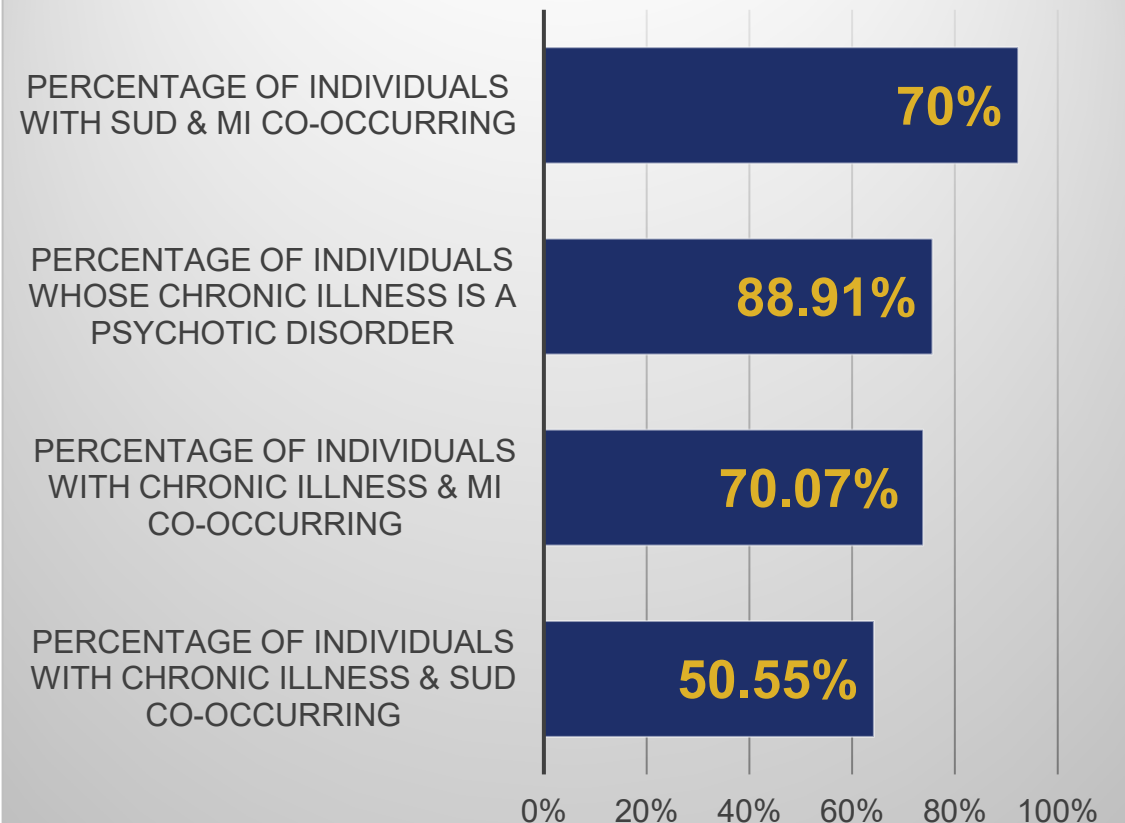


# The Population We Care For

## Overall MSO Health Profile



## Co-Occurrence Health Profile





# The Paradigm Shift in Corrections: An Emphasis on Reentry

No more “released at the gate”

## A focus on Reentry

- Evidence-based
- Results-driven
- Driving lasting change

## Reentry Begins on Day One

- Targeted Programming



# Incarceration as a Key Opportunity for Intervention

**Evidence-based programming targeting criminogenic risk factors that are too often left unaddressed**

- Tailored to specific populations

**Focus is on establishing a continuity of care**

- Travels throughout the CJ system
- Individual's recovery and reentry is placed at the forefront

**Warm handoff to service providers**

- Opportunities to continue post-release





# Unique programming for unique populations produces unique results

## **MATADOR**

- Medication Assisted Treatment & Directed Opioid Recovery Program
  - 17.9% recidivism rate

## **HUMV**

- Housing Unit for Military Veterans
  - 14% recidivism rate

## **PACT**

- People Achieving Change Together Unit
  - 16.3% recidivism rate

## **OAR**

- Older Adult Reentry

## **Frederick Douglass Project**

- Connecting incarcerated individuals with the community

## **Women's Pre-Release Center**

- Preparing women to return home

## **Project EARTH**

- Education & restoration through horticulture

## **FSSU**

- One stop shop for services

## **Family mediation**

- Restoring fractured relationships



# What Reentry Looks Like

## Reentry begins at Day One

- Assigned a case manager at intake
- Specialized plan for that individual's reentry
- ORAS – Ohio Risk Assessment System

## Connections to Resources

- Programs
- Family
- Housing

## Regular check-ins by Case Managers

- “Do you have a plan for when you leave?”



# Homelessness Prevention

## A part of every program and Unit

- A place to sleep is critical to a successful reentry

## Case Managers

- “Where are you going when you are released?”
- Search for placement upon release date

## Reentry Navigators

- Relentless follow up



# Family Support

## Relational Poverty

- 1 in 3 individuals cite relational brokenness as a primary cause of their homelessness

## Family Support Services Unit

- First in the nation
- Offers support and resources to families impacted by incarceration
- Creates stronger family relationships
- Develops family-focused reentry plans
- Staffed by civilian and sworn staff

## 42,785 minutes of communication since FSSU launched

- 6,430 families helped

## Family mediation





# Diversion Efforts

## **You should not have to come to jail for treatment**

- Time to act is before they get into our custody
- Need for community-based opportunities for people who are not in the criminal justice system

## **Middlesex County Restoration Center**

- Alternative to emergency rooms and incarceration for individuals experiencing behavioral health crises
- Place where you can be dropped off to access desperately-needed services
- Access to services that does not lead to becoming criminal-justice involved



# Call to Action

## 1) Engage with your local Sheriffs

- Identify at-risk individuals while they are in custody

## 2) Sheriffs are often first responders

- Opportunity to engage before incarceration

## 3) They want to hear from you!

- Call me if you need help connecting



# THANK YOU



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