

*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*****

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**“Shawnee County, Kansas
Joins Nationwide Call to Action
to Reduce the Number of People
with Mental Illnesses in Jails”**

Shawnee County, Kansas — ~~05/03/4/23/2021~~ Shawnee County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) announced its commitment to reduce the number of people in jails who have mental illnesses by participating in [Stepping Up](#)—a nationwide initiative to reduce the prevalence of mental illness in local justice systems. The Stepping Up initiative was launched in May 2015 by The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center, the National Association of Counties (NACo), and the American Psychiatric Association Foundation (APA Foundation) to mobilize local, state, and national leaders to achieve a measurable reduction in the number of people in jail who have mental illnesses and ultimately connect more people to needed treatment.

To date, more than 520 counties have joined the initiative, including Shawnee County, Kansas, in 43 states, representing 48 percent of the U.S. population, have committed to the *Stepping Up* goal.

Bill D. Persinger, Jr., CEO at Valeo Behavioral Health Care, Inc., and Shawnee County Corrections Director, Brian Cole, worked with community partners last Fall to develop and organize “**The Intersection Coalition**”. The Intersection Coalition is a broad-based, collaborative group working on the large and active intersection where all facets of the criminal justice system meet the public behavioral health public safety-net continuum of care.

Shawnee County, Kansas has committed to reducing the number of people with mental illnesses in their local justice systems, and will continue taking significant steps toward reducing the number of people in its jail who have mental illnesses, such as increasing liaison and care-coordination activities between county corrections and behavioral healthcare, strengthening behavioral health services in the county jail, enhancing early-intervention/prevention services such as the CIT/Co-Responder Program, improving access to post-release mental health and/or addictions treatment, promoting housing/work/food-security in the community, increasing the capacity and availability of specialty courts, enhancing crisis care connections, and improving data-gathering and analysis to name a few.

Shawnee County also joins other Kansas counties in its participation in the **Kansas Stepping Up Technical Assistance (TA) Center** (Audra Goldsmith, Coordinator), sponsored by the State of

Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services, where the County and the Intersection Coalition receive tailored guidance to support Stepping Up efforts.

Shawnee County was the first Kansas County to pass a Stepping Up Resolution since the formation of the Kansas Stepping Up TA Center. Members of the Shawnee County Commission include Kevin Cook (Chair), Aaron Mays, and Bill Riphahn.

To see a list of all Stepping Up counties and find out more about the initiative, visit stepuptogether.org.

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ABOUT THE STEPPING UP INITIATIVE

Stepping Up is a national initiative to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in jails. The initiative is a collaboration between the CSG Justice Center, NACo, and the APA Foundation. In February 2021, the Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services and the CSG Justice Center announced the opening of the Kansas Stepping Up Technical Assistance Center. The center offers assistance tailored specifically to Kansas counties to support policies and programs improving outcomes for people with mental illnesses and co-occurring substance use disorders in jails. Kansas counties interested in receiving assistance can reach out to KansasSteppingUp@csg.org.