

# Infrastructure to Advance Quality of Care and Reforms

Infrastructure is needed to advance the quality of care for individuals with mental illness who are involved in the justice system. A series of papers found infrastructure leads to increased participation in reform activities, such as Stepping Up; reductions in per capita jail population; and the adoption of evidence-based practices and treatments. The studies explored census data and survey results from 758 respondents (432 criminal justice, 311 behavioral health, 15 multi-agency) to answer the questions:

- 1. What are important features of infrastructure?**
- 2. Why does past participating on reforms matter?**
- 3. What works in improving quality of care?**



## What is infrastructure?

Definition: Infrastructure refers to staffing, resources, and policies to support service delivery

Features:

- **Sufficient staffing:** The Health Resources and Services Administration classifies counties in terms of Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs) and Medically Underserved Areas/Populations (MUAs/Ps)—indicating too few primary care providers, high infant mortality, high poverty, or a high elderly population. 50% of the US population live in areas that lacks sufficient mental health staff.
- **Resources:** Available funding through Medicaid (federal), state or local resources.
- **Policies:** Regulations, legislation, and/or standardized practices that emphasize practices and treatments that are informed by research evidence and considered quality care.



## Why should counties be encouraged to participate in grants/reform activities?

Around 28% of counties participate in federal grants and/or reform activities. Participation assists counties in making strides in improving quality of services including expanding the number and type of evidence-based treatments and practices.

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### What works in improving quality of care?

Studies have found that infrastructure is crucial to achieving better outcomes.

#### Reduce jail populations

*The size of the jail (per capita) is affected by:*

1. Fewer community treatment services
2. Reduced access to mental health providers, and drug treatment services
3. Demographics: County populations under 250,000, more residents without a high school diploma, more residents with health issues

#### Key Takeaway

- Increase MH providers and affordable drug treatment services

#### Source

Ramezani et al., 2022  
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35906627/>

#### Participate in SU

*Stepping Up is one of the largest reform activities for counties to address MH individuals in jail; counties that participate often have:*

1. Improved availability and access to medical and behavioral health care
2. Better health care infrastructure including sufficient mental health providers per capita
3. Medicaid funding for drug treatment services
4. A medical school

#### Key Takeaways

- Counties that have more mental health providers
- Counties with Medicaid funding of drug treatment services

Source: Ramezani et al., 2023.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37401987/>

#### Use Evidence-based Policies and Treatments

59 EBPTs of which each county has 21.9%–43.0% of these EBPTs.

1. Sufficient clinical staff resources
2. History of participating in grants
3. Peer supports in SUD and/or MH services
4. Reduced staff turnover in MH, SUD services
5. Being in a Stepping Up county and/or Medicaid expansion state fosters the growth of programs that require fewer resources

#### Key Takeaways

- Invest in quality staff to expand services
- Focus on adding peer supports

Source: Taxman et al., 2025

<https://doi.org/10.1080/23774657.2024.2447693> ; Johnson, et al 2023  
<https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.20230029>