

Addressing the Competency Crisis Using an Innovative Local Mobile Treatment Model



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Objectives

1

Discuss how local competency restoration services can address the competency crisis and reduce incarceration.

2

Explain how to partner with stakeholders to ensure competency restoration services are available on a local level.

3

Describe the planning and implementation process for the mobile treatment focused model developed in Allegheny County.

The Competency Crisis Across

GOVERNMENT & POLITICS

Senate approves measure to resolve landmark suit against Oklahoma

BY BARBARA HOBEROCK - MARCH 4, 2025 2:57 PM



QUEENS Daily News

CLOSING ARGUMENT

For People Mentally Unfit For Trial, Waits For Treatment Get Longer

U.S. defendants must be able to understand the charges against them — but many who can't remain behind bars waiting for mental health treatment.

HOME QUEENS NEWS CORONAVIRUS LAW OF
'Indef' 'legal limbo': State
treat
August'

MISSOURI

GOVERNMENT + POLITICS

HEALTH CARE

CANNABIS

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

ELECTIONS

ENERGY + ENVIRONMENT

HEALTH CARE

EDUCATION

INDEPENDENT

AUGUST 15, 2024 3:35 AM

Hundreds of M... jail waiting

The number
reached

SPOTLIGHT PA

INVESTIGATION

A CRIMINAL SOLUTION

Determining whether someone is mentally fit to stand trial in Pennsylvania often traps them in the very place making them worse — jail. This is the story of one woman's fight to get out.

continue to languish in services

ferred to state mental health facilities



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LAWSUIT CLAIMS THAT PERSONS FOUND INCOMPETENT TO STAND TRIAL MAY SPEND MONTHS IN JAILS RATHER THAN RECEIVE RESTORATION SERVICES

Diana Robinson

vs for competency
vada, could a new
s get dismissed?

The Competency Crisis in Allegheny County

In January 2016, the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services entered into a settlement agreement with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to reduce jail waitlists for competency restoration at two state hospitals, including Torrance State Hospital.

In 2018, Allegheny County began work to establish a Jail-Based Competency Restoration Program at ACJ after Policy Research Associates, Inc. completed an independent study and produced a report that stated, “at least one-third of the defendants on the waitlist could more quickly and more inexpensively regain competency with high quality restoration at the local jail”, but this project was terminated.

The Competency Crisis in Allegheny County

In 2024, individuals found not competent to stand trial spent over 13,000 days in the Allegheny County Jail while awaiting transfer to Torrance State Hospital for Competency Restoration.

**Time from Commitment to admission for those who eventually were admitted to Torrance in 2024-176 commitments*

Competency Evaluation Process in Allegheny County

Judge issues court order for Competency Evaluation. *This often happens at the initial hearing but can happen at any point in the legal process prior to resolution of charges.*

A doctor from the Behavioral Assessment Unit (BAU), part of Pretrial Services, assesses the individual to determine if they are competent to stand trial. *This usually happens within 48-72 hours of the court order.*

If the individual is found competent, the behavioral health hold is lifted and the case proceeds as usual.

If an individual is found **not** competent to stand trial, they are held in the jail while awaiting transfer to Torrance on a commitment. This is currently Allegheny County's only option for competency restoration services. The court case can not move forward until competence is restored.

If the individual is found not competent to stand trial and not restorable, a plan is developed to release with services/support in the community or a civil commitment is pursued. The charges are usually dismissed.

Behavior Assessment Unit-2024

1,106 total competency evaluations completed.

110 individuals assessed as not competent to stand trial.

40 individuals assessed as not restorable by the BAU and/or Torrance State Hospital.

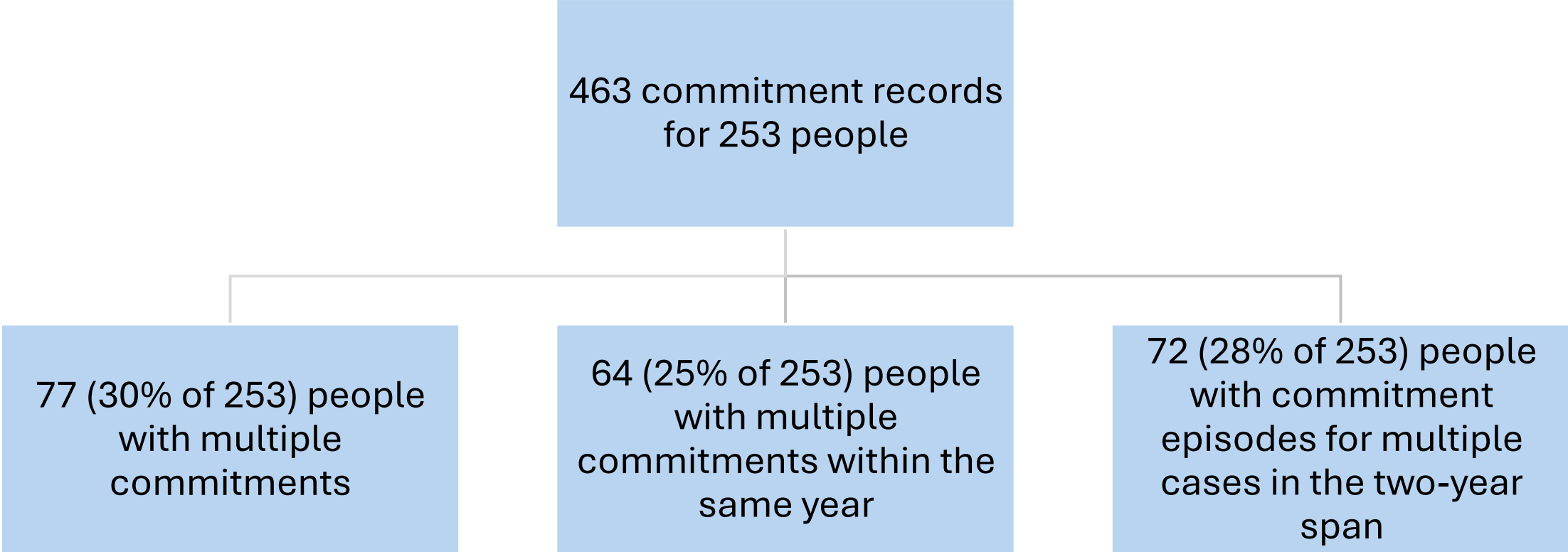
141 petitions filed by the BAU – includes petitions to Torrance State Hospital, re-petitions of expired 304c commitments for defendants awaiting transfer, and petitions to LTSRs.

Allegheny Wait Times for Torrance

Median wait time in ACJ for Torrance admission (2018-2024)

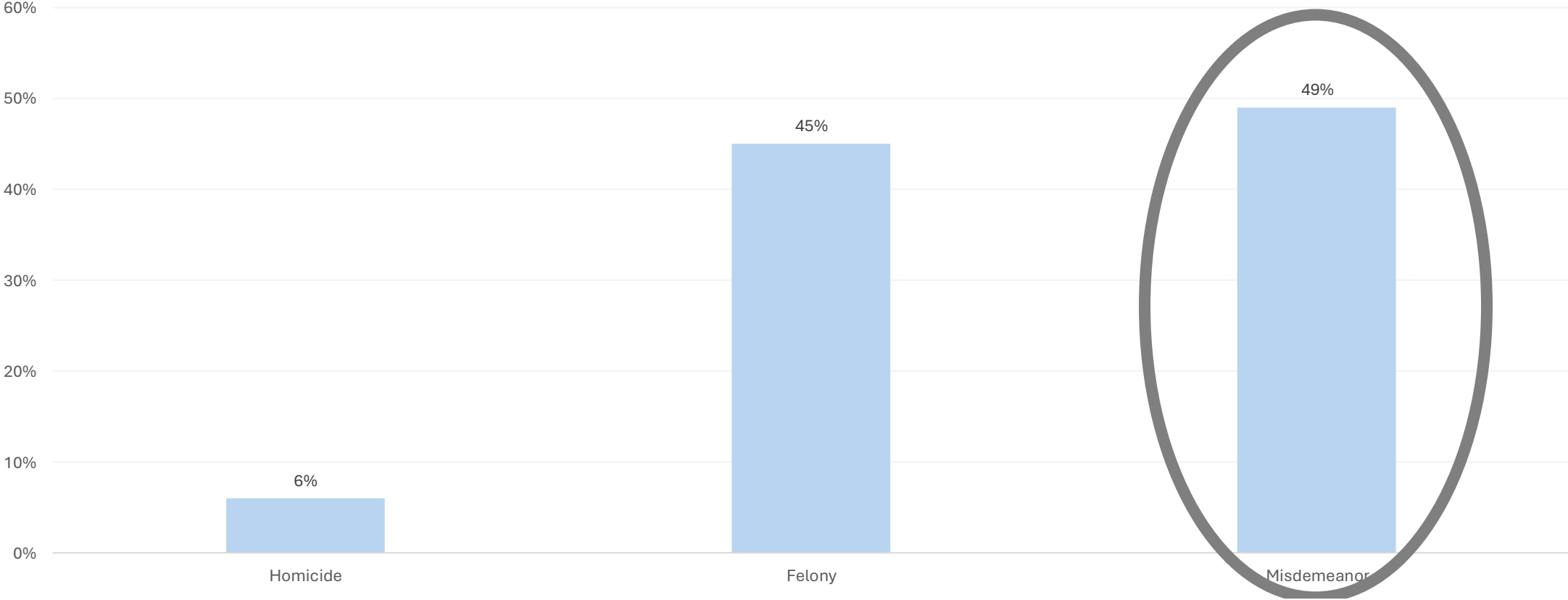
82 days

Allegheny County Data (2023-24)

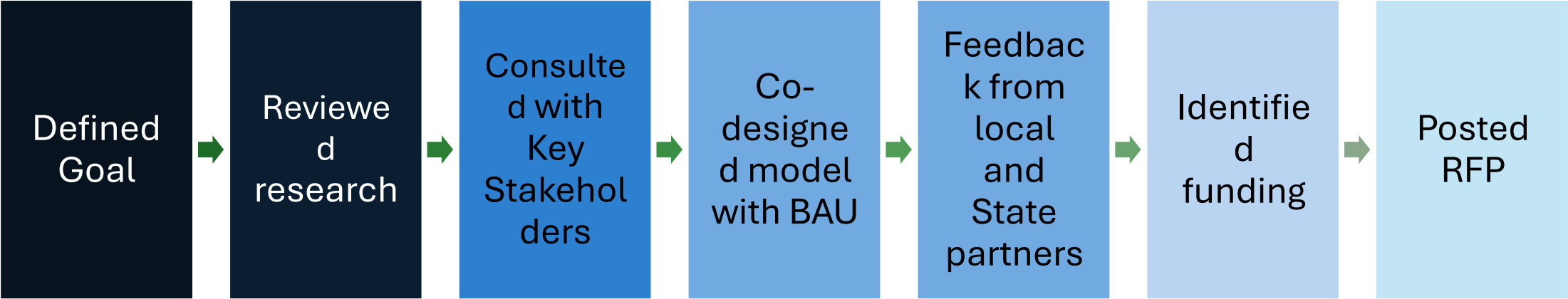


Highest Grade and Charge Type – Cases at Time of Commitment

Torrance Commitments - Highest Grade of Case(s) at Time of Commitment (2023-2024, N=453)



Addressing the Competency Crisis in Allegheny County



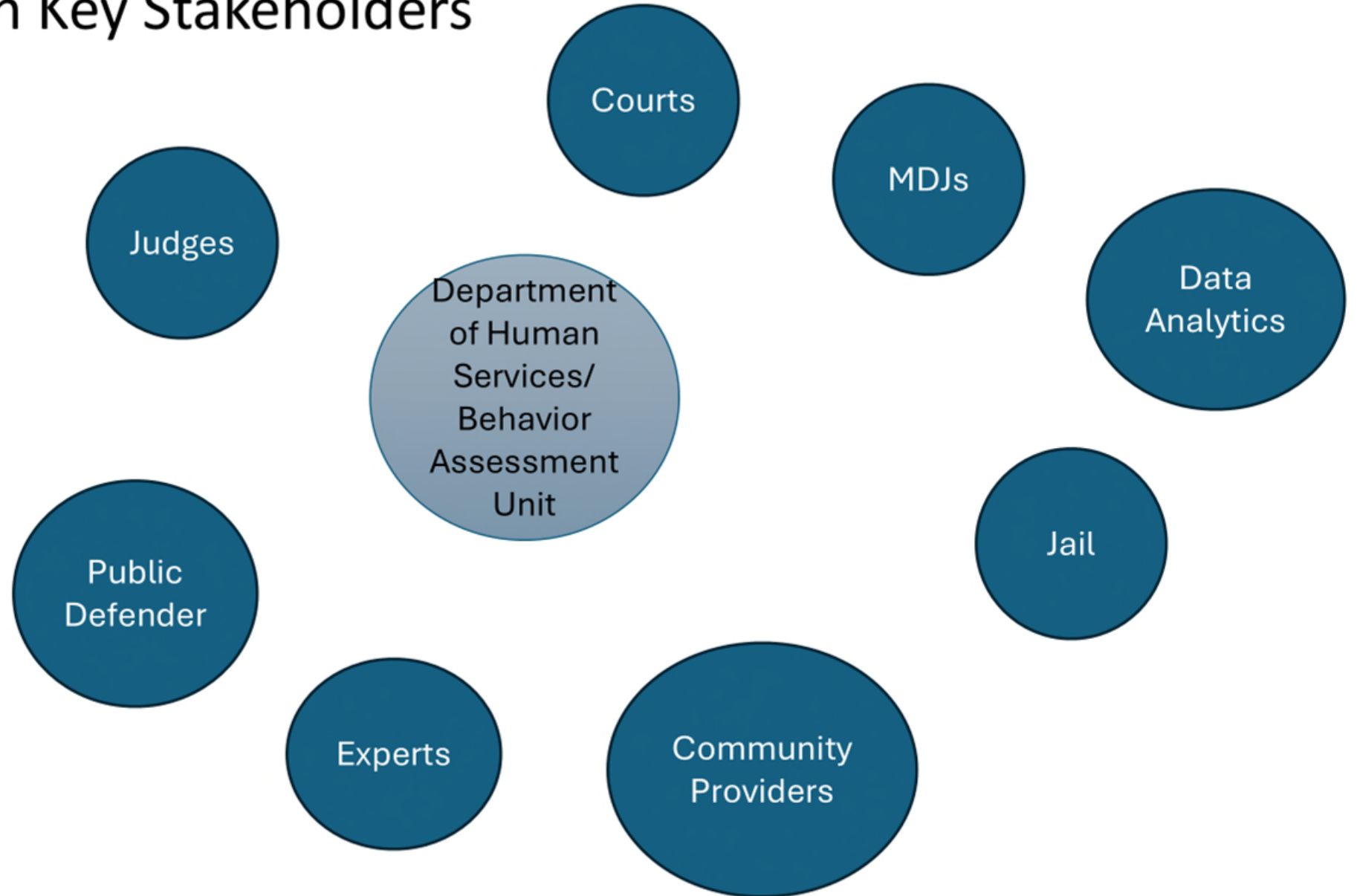
Defined Goal

Offer competency restoration services on a local level in order to reduce wait times to Torrance State Hospital and reduce length of incarceration for individuals with SMI who are found not competent to stand trial.

Existing Service Models Reviewed for Consideration

- Outpatient Diversion with Competency Restoration Clinic (OCRC)
- Designated Beds at a Mental Health CRR Group Home
- Specialized Restoration Center
- Jail Based Program utilizing a Specialized Program Pod
- Mobile Competency Team (psychoeducational only)

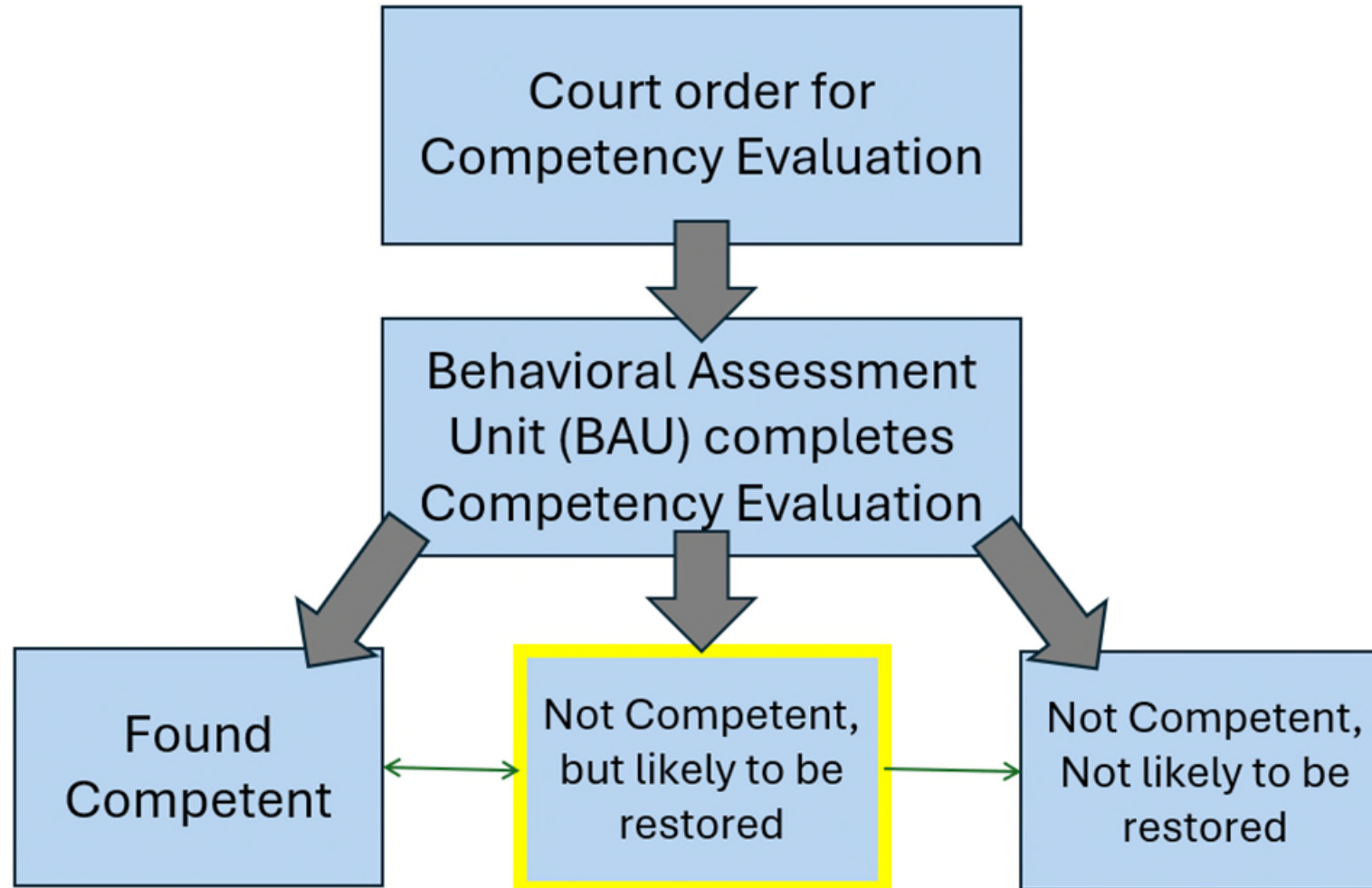
Consulted with Key Stakeholders



Recommendation- Creation and Implementation of a Mobile Competency Restoration and Support Team (MCRST)

- Multidisciplinary Team
- Provides services in all settings except state hospital, including jail and treatment settings
- Includes both clinical treatment and psychoeducational services
- Stays engaged until case is resolved and community services are in place
- Assertive engagement

Competency Evaluation Process in Allegheny County- With MCRST



Anticipated Outcomes

Reduced:

- Time waiting for state hospital admission
- Overall length of stay at Allegheny County Jail
- Commitments to state hospital for competency restoration
- Revocations to jail for the purpose of state hospital commitment
- Re-evaluations by BAU
- Returns to the legal competency process

• Increased:

- Post-release engagement with mental health treatment
- Capacity to restore competency in non-carceral and non-inpatient setting
- Cost Savings

MCRST Scope of Service

Provides individualized services to all individuals found not competent to stand trial in all settings except state hospital, including jail and treatment settings, including regular in person contact, and persistent engagement

Develops a treatment plan/case plan and provide supports through any transitions across settings until the court case is resolved AND community services are in place, if applicable, or the individual is transferred to a facility out of county

Provides 24/7 on call crisis support and continuity of care, leveraging and collaborating with any existing services.

MCRST Staffing Structure

Program Manager (1FTE): *Oversee all program operations*

Psychiatrist (or Psychiatry Fellow) (.33 FTE): *Psychiatric evaluation and medication*

Mental Health RN (1 FTE): *Medication psychoeducation, treatment planning*

Dual Diagnosis Therapist (1 FTE): *Counseling for mental health and/or substance use*

Certified Forensic Peer Counselor (1 FTE): *Informal support/check-ins*

Forensic Specialist or Specialized JRS Forensic Support Specialist (2 FTE): *Provides intensive service coordination, communication with courts/legal system, connection to community resources, release planning if applicable*

Competency Support Specialist (2 FTE): *Provides legal education using PACOMPKIT curriculum*

Billing Analyst: *Collect data and submit billing*

MCRST-Level of Care Structure

Minimum Required Standards by Service Level of Care					
Service Type	Intensive	Intermediate	Supportive	Transitional	Aftercare
DD Therapist	4 per month (weekly)	3 per month	2 per month (biweekly)	Monthly	none
Competency Support Specialist	Twice weekly	Weekly	Weekly	Monthly	none
JRS Case Worker	Monthly	Monthly	Monthly	Monthly	Biweekly
Peer Support Specialist	Biweekly	weekly	Biweekly ACJ/ Weekly Community	Weekly	Biweekly
MH RN	4 per month (weekly)	3 per month	2 per month (biweekly)	Monthly	none
Psychiatrist	Monthly	Monthly	Quarterly	Quarterly	none
Collateral Contact	2 per month community/ monthly jail	Monthly	Monthly	Monthly	Monthly
Group Contact	case by case	2 per month (biweekly)	Weekly	Monthly	none

MCRST and Community Providers

Example	Psychiatrist	Mental Health Nurse	Dual Diagnosis Therapist	Peer Counselor	Specialized JRS Forensic Support Specialist	Competency Support Specialist
Individual not actively engaged in any treatment services	MCRST	MCRST	MCRST	MCRST	MCRST	MCRST
Individual with CTT	CTT	CTT	CTT	CTT	MCRST	MCRST
Individual in community treatment setting (LTSR, CRU, TRU, DAS, inpatient)	Community Treatment Provider	Community Treatment Provider	Community Treatment Provider	MCRST	MCRST	MCRST
Individual with Outpatient Services	Outpatient if active, otherwise MCRST	Outpatient if active, otherwise MCRST	Outpatient if active, otherwise MCRST	MCRST	MCRST	MCRST

MCRST-Implementation

Soft Launch Phase

- Began taking referrals on 3/18/25
- Pts in the ACJ who are committed and awaiting transfer to TSH
- 4/21/25 began taking referrals for pts returning from TSH as competent
- Hiring and Onboarding Psychiatrist
- Began recruiting for Billing Analyst position

Full Launch

- June 2025
- Began taking referrals for patients in the ACJ and community who are found not competent and likely to be restored
- Some pts are awaiting TSH transfer
- Some pts do not meet criteria for inpatient hospitalization and are eligible for services in the community
- Competency Court Docket Launch
- Transition to Medicaid billing 2026

MCRST- The first 5 months

- 106 individuals served (23 closed)
- 66 active
 - 46 incarcerated (ACJ or Torrance)
 - 20 community (12 court active/8 pending closure)
- 17 receiving informal check ins and group (“hold”)
- 30 Diversions from Torrance to date
 - Community: 5
 - Jail-no commitment: 7 (3 have been released into community)
 - 18 rescinded commitments due to stabilization
- 17 Restored to Competence by MCRST
- 66.7% engage and consent on first attempt -most others consent 2-5 days later

Allegheny County Wait Times for Torrance

Median wait time in ACJ for Torrance admission (2025)

47 days

Lessons Learned

- Phased implementation is crucial to ensure all partners can work through any questions/concerns that arise
- Staffing adjustments/case loads
- Initial maintenance referrals- different process needed
- Times where judges may be more risk adverse
- Be creative in how plans are presented



A close-up photograph of a hand in a white suit sleeve holding a wooden gavel. The gavel is positioned over a wooden desk. In the background, a lamp with a gold-colored base and a white shade is visible, casting a warm glow. The scene is set in what appears to be a courtroom or a formal office.

Challenges Encountered

- Judicial Buy-in
- Finding the right provider/staff
- Jail rapport is critical
- Approved releases
- Housing availability

Key Takeaways

- Collaboration and Education across systems is critical (DHS, Courts, MDJs, Pretrial, Jail, Public Defender, Community providers)
- This work must be tailored to the needs of the community it serves.
- You can *and should* provide humane, therapeutic, and legal competency restoration services using a local model in the least restrictive setting allowable by the courts.





ALLEGHENY COUNTY

Government

Allegheny County to offer defendants mental health support, reduce time behind bars waiting for care

90.5 WESA | By Julia Zenkevich
Published April 24, 2025 at 5:30 AM EDT



Put
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support i



through the legal system.



Centurion Health
March 14 · 🌐

Exciting News for Allegheny County, PA!

The Mobile Competency Restoration Support Team (MCRST) is here to provide comprehensive

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ap

nch of the Mobile Competency
and not competent to stand trial.
reatment and psychoeducational

JUSTICE SYSTEM
People v
count
by Dan:

mental illness can languish in jail. This Pa a new mobile clinic can help.

29, 2025

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