

# Mental Health

## SUMMARY

The public perception of people who suffer from mental health issues is that they are more likely to commit acts of violence and aggression. People with mental illness are more likely to be the victims of violent crime.

## BACKGROUND

Mental health issues impact every community, workforce, and school in the nation. One in five people experience a mental health issue in their lifetime, and even more have family members or friends who suffer from mental illness.

More and more individuals in our community who find themselves homeless are also experiencing a mental health crisis. When people are unable to access routine medical treatment, the added stress of being homeless compounds the underlying issues. This can lead to self-medication with illicit drugs and substance use disorders. We can hold a person accountable for the criminal acts they commit, but only if they are able to assist in their defense. As with any disease, if we are able to treat the underlying mental health condition, we may be better able to resolve the additional problems that may result.

## CURRENT STATUS

Mental health covers a broad array of issues and has varying degrees of impact to someone's day to day life. Individuals that are experiencing a crisis may be afraid or embarrassed to seek help or they don't know where to turn. Compounding the issue, there is no mental health facility on the Olympic Peninsula, the closest is in Kitsap County.

Communities cannot rely on our police departments to do the job of mental health professionals; police officers lack substantive training and in many ways are prohibited by law.

To address this, many jurisdictions are partnering with local mental health providers to address the issues we are seeing in our own neighborhoods. The police department and area mental health providers are working together to get services to individuals who need it most, specifically the mentally ill among our homeless population.

In conjunction, local courts have or are beginning to have therapeutic court programs to address a multitude of issues, which allows each individual to receive the appropriate treatment and to address the criminal activity at the same time.

In order to have someone committed involuntarily, they must be found to be gravely disabled or a danger to self or others as a result of the mental illness. They will be evaluated by a designated mental health professional to see if the legal requirement for commitment has been met. If it is, then the court will be involved. If not, the person will be released. *Law enforcement cannot make the decision to involuntarily commit someone.*

## SCENARIOS/EXAMPLES

- If someone calls police to report a person whose behavior is concerning, the police will respond. The police will assess the situation to see if a crime is being committed. If the person appears to be a danger to themselves or others, the officer will call mental health professionals who will advise the officer about next steps.
- If someone is experiencing a mental health crisis in public, it does not necessarily mean they are committing a crime. While it might seem scary or concerning to you, if the person does not pose a danger to themselves or others it is not a situation where law enforcement can detain the person.

## SOURCES

[Mental Health Coalition - Mental Health & Homelessness](#)

[Washington State Health Care Authority - ITA Fact Sheet](#)

[Washington State Health Care Authority – Ricky’s Law: Involuntary Treatment Act](#)

[RCW 71.05 – Mental Illness](#)

[RCW 2.30.010 Findings – Scope of Therapeutic Court Programs](#)

[National Alliance of Mental Health \(NAMI\)](#)

[MRSC Police, Mental Health Professionals Partner to Improve 911 Response](#)

For additional information, please see the City’s other “Fact Sheets” related to this issue.