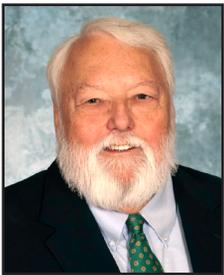




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Mental Health Month: Texas Correctional Office on Offenders with Medical or Mental Impairments

By Judge Larry Gist, Member



Judge Larry Gist

In order to inform the public of mental health facts and remove the stigma associated with mental illness, the U.S. Congress has designated May as Mental Health Month. To help achieve this goal, the Texas Board of Criminal Justice and the Texas Department of Criminal Justice are committed to serving the needs of offenders with mental illness and impairments in both pre-release correctional settings and post-release community settings.

The agency's Reentry and Integration Division ensures continuity of care for such offenders through the Texas Correctional Office on Offenders with Medical or Mental Impairments programs. For more than 25 years TCOOMMI has implemented many program initiatives to meet the unique needs

and challenges associated with offenders with mental illness releasing to communities across the state. Currently, TCOOMMI contracts with 38 Local Mental Health Authorities to serve offenders with severe and persistent mental health diagnoses.

Continuity of care efforts provided by all 38 LMHA programs can serve offenders up to 90 days in an outpatient setting. While receiving continuity of care services, participants receive assistance in psychosocial rehabilitation, psychiatric care, medication and monitoring, individual/group therapy and skills training, benefit eligibility services to include federal entitlement application processing, and screening and linkage to appropriate medical services. Many participants have needs that require additional support which can include employment assistance, access to stable housing and medical care, to include obtaining a payer source for prescriptions. The LMHA program design allows staff to develop a treatment plan

tailored to each offender's needs and risk. Having a customized approach to meeting the needs of each participant has helped foster a collaborative work dynamic between the LMHAs, community resource affiliates and nonprofit organizations that effectively serve this population.

TDCJ's efforts to provide appropriate services to a varied and complex offender population with mental illness go well beyond one month out of the year; its dedication has spanned more than two decades and the agency will continue to assist offenders reintegrating into society while maximizing community resources. ●