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## **New Website Helps Improve Coordination Between Justice and Health Systems**

People involved in the criminal justice system have significantly higher rates of behavioral and physical health problems than the general population. For example, the rate of serious mental illness among incarcerated persons is estimated to be more than three times higher than in the general population. Adding to these challenges is the fact that these persons and others involved in justice systems have limited access to healthcare both inside facilities and in the communities to which they are released. A historical lack of coordination between justice and health agencies exacerbates these issues even further. Consequently, people with drug and alcohol use disorders, mental illness, and other chronic diseases routinely fail to get the treatment that they need. Research shows that increasing access to treatment can address health disparities, reduce costs, and lower re-arrest rates.

To help close this communication gap, and increase information sharing between justice and health authorities, The Vera Institute of Justice's Substance Use and Mental Health Program (SUMH) today launched the Justice and Health Connect (JH Connect) website [www.jhconnect.org](http://www.jhconnect.org). This initiative was made possible with support from the DOJ's Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), which promotes information sharing solutions for state, local, and tribal authorities. To that end, JH Connect provides a series of resources, with the aim of increasing agencies' abilities to share data between community health and justice systems in a confidential, legal, and ethical way. The goal is to better serve people with behavioral and other health needs who come into contact with justice systems.

The website includes a wide range of materials, including a toolkit for designing information sharing initiatives, an extensive resource library, policy briefs, legal memos, templates, and webinars. The materials are designed for diverse audiences and jurisdictions. These resources will offer guidance on the type of data exchanges that are legally permissible, outline their potential ethical pitfalls, and highlight promising practices that maximize benefits to clients while reducing costs.

