

# Lessons from a Canadian province: examining collaborations between the mental health and justice sectors

Carolyn S. Dewa · Lucy Trojanowski ·  
Chiachen Cheng · Frank Sirotych

Received: 8 October 2010 / Revised: 1 February 2011 / Accepted: 1 June 2011 / Published online: 17 June 2011  
© Swiss School of Public Health 2011

## Abstract

**Objective** The objective of this paper was to identify the factors that program developers perceived as important to the successful collaboration between the mental health and justice sectors in seven Ontario, Canada, post-booking programs.

**Methods** Semi-structured telephone interviews with developers of the programs in each region were conducted. Key informants were identified using a snowball technique. All transcripts were analyzed using a modified grounded theory approach.

**Results** The primary themes identified involved partnership development, adjustment to broader mandates and addressing ongoing challenges. Conclusions were validated through member checking.

**Conclusions** The findings highlight important considerations for cross-ministerial enterprises. If partnerships are constructed within the existing parameters of systems, the system with the most flexibility will be required to work around its partner's constraints. The role of the adapter could be acknowledged by having the funding flow through

the adapter's system. Program development will involve a significant time investment including activities to become part of both systems' culture through education, establishing a presence and identifying boundary spanners. Long-run implications for both systems should also be considered.

**Keywords** Community mental health · Criminal justice · Court support programs

## Introduction

Over the past two decades, there has been growing reliance on the criminal justice system to care for people with severe mental illness (Schneider 2010). This has been attributed in part to decreased psychiatric inpatient facilities (Schneider 2010; Morrissey et al. 2007). Morrissey et al. (2007) estimate that persons with severe mental illness in the USA are jailed 1.5 times more often than they are admitted to psychiatric hospitals. Additional US studies have found that between 28 and 52% of persons with serious mental illness have been arrested at least once (Fisher et al. 2006; Holcomb and Ahr 1988; McFarland et al. 1989). There is also evidence that a large proportion of people with serious mental illness have multiple bookings and charges (Rivas-Vazquez et al. 2009; Cusack et al. 2010, 2009). A Canadian study reported that compared to people without mental illnesses, those with mental illnesses have on average three times more police interactions (Hoch et al. 2009). Depending on the setting, methodology and specific definition of serious mental illness, estimates of the prevalence of serious mental illness among jail inmates and prisoners in the US vary between 6 and 31% (Broner et al. 2003; Ditton 1999; Lamb and Weinberger 1998; Steadman

---

This paper belongs to the special issue "Intersectoral action to address the social determinants of health".

---

C. S. Dewa (✉) · L. Trojanowski  
Health Systems Research and Consulting Unit,  
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Toronto, ON, Canada  
e-mail: carolyn\_dewa@camh.net

C. Cheng  
Canadian Mental Health Association, Thunder Bay,  
Thunder Bay, ON, Canada

F. Sirotych  
Canadian Mental Health Association, Toronto,  
Toronto, ON, Canada