



MEMORANDUM

TO: Whatcom County Council

FROM: Justice Project Planning Team

RE: Justice Project Implementation Plan – Progress Update

DATE: May 17, 2023

We are looking forward to seeing you on May 23rd at the Committee of the Whole meeting to discuss the Justice Project Implementation Plan. At this workshop, we will discuss each of the proposed implementation projects (see revised draft project list, attached) and ask for your questions, concerns, and suggestions. Your feedback will help us shape the draft Implementation Plan, which will be presented for your review in a few weeks, followed by a final draft plan at the end of June.

The Implementation Plan will include recommendations for:

- Systems and services efforts and costs
- Proposed facilities concepts for community services and costs (i.e., ideas for building size and configuration to accommodate desired activities)
- Jail facilities concept, including location and planning level costs
- Identification of county departments, community leaders, and organizations to guide implementation
- A funding approach, including elements for inclusion in a proposed sales tax ballot measure

A [Town Hall Listening Session](#) will be held on Wednesday, May 24th, from 6:00-8:00 pm. This is a hybrid meeting with remote, online participation as well as in-person participation in the Council Chambers. *The event is being held as a Special Meeting of the Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force (IPRTF) and a Special Meeting of the Whatcom County Council. A quorum of the members may attend and participate.*

More information on the Justice Project Implementation Plan is available online at www.whatcomcounty.us/justice.

Members of the public can email comments on the draft Implementation Plan to IPRTaskForce@co.whatcom.wa.us.

Potential Implementation Plan Projects

DRAFT May 17, 2023

Objectives:





- **Increase Access to Behavioral Health Services**
- **Expand the Capacity of Programs to Reduce Incarceration/Re-incarceration**
- **Build the Array of Facilities Needed to Promote Public Health and Safety**
- **Make Systems Changes with Local, Regional, & State Partners**
- **Measure and Share Progress for Accountability and Transparency, and Plan for the Future**


People who struggle with mental health and substance use disorders are more at risk for incarceration, and being in jail can be traumatizing. About half of the people now in jail have mental health treatment needs and about 80% have substance use disorders. Whatcom County does not have enough services now to help them.


Part of the problem is that current programs do not have the staff, funding, and other resources needed to function at full capacity. Another is that there are systemic gaps that prevent programs with proven effectiveness from scaling up. For example, GRACE and LEAD are two programs that serve a navigation role to support people at risk of incarceration/re-incarceration into BH services. Increasing the capacity of diversion programs such as GRACE and LEAD must be done in tandem with scaling up mental health, supportive housing, case management, medication prescribers, and other community-based behavioral health services.

To keep people out of jail, we need to stop the cycle of re-incarceration. There is a critical need for more re-entry support - creating a soft landing when people are released from jail, linking people with case management, peer support, housing, jobs, and medical/behavioral health services.


Improving services should help reduce the frequency of incarceration in Whatcom County. However, safe and humane jail facilities also are needed, along with other facilities in which people who are struggling with behavioral health issues can be stabilized and supported and avoid incarceration.


- **Increase Access to Behavioral Health Services** for people involved, or at risk of involvement, with the criminal legal system
 1.  **Increase the capacity of effective existing programs to divert people from incarceration** in tandem with community support services to enable people with behavioral health issues to successfully complete diversion programs.
 2.  **Build systems to facilitate communication and coordination between organizations** providing services for a seamless continuum of care.
 3.  **Address workforce shortages in behavioral health services**, including recruitment and retention strategies to ensure an inclusive, well-trained workforce.
- **Expand the Capacity of Programs to Reduce Incarceration/Re-incarceration**
 4.  **Ensure people leaving jail have transportation to a safe destination.**


5.  **Bolster Re-entry Support Services** – Establish jail-based and community-based locations where people can receive coordinated re-entry support services such as case management, peer support, and assistance with housing, employment, healthcare, etc.

6.  **Ensure ongoing efforts to maintain and expand supportive housing programs include services for people with behavioral health issues and a history of incarceration** (e.g., additional housing facilities, well-trained on-site clinical support, and housing case management services).


▪ **Build the Array of Facilities Needed to Promote Public Health and Safety**

7.  **Build a 23-hour Crisis Relief Center** (Behavioral Health Urgent Care open all hours, seven days per week) to enable prompt and appropriate intervention when a person is having a behavioral health crisis to prevent incarceration.


8.  **Build a safe and humane jail, coordinating with a Behavioral Care Center** to provide secure, short-term behavioral health treatment as an alternative to jail for people charged with a crime.

9.  **Research the feasibility of building additional facilities for voluntary and involuntary treatment of people with serious mental illness and/or substance use disorders.**

▪ **Make Systems Changes with Local, Regional, & State Partners**


10.  **Continue to make changes in court systems** to reduce the number of people detained in jail, and the length of time they spend in jail before trial, and provide and evaluate options in lieu of bail.


11.  **Advocate for a state waiver to allow use of Medicaid funds to pay for jail-based medical and behavioral health services.**

12.  **Expedite access to competency restoration services** through advocacy at the state level and exploration and development of outpatient alternatives (e.g., Prosecutorial Diversion Program, Assisted Outpatient Treatment).

▪ **Measure and Share Progress for Accountability and Transparency, and Plan for the Future**

13.  **Collect data to measure progress toward desired outcomes.**

14.  **Develop a data dashboard** for criminal legal system organizations to share data with one another and the public.

15.  **Include BIPOC communities and people with lived experience in the oversight of progress and future planning efforts.**