

**Early Access & Stabilization Services
CSAC 2022 Challenge Award Nomination
County of Kings**

Category: Administration of Justice
and Public Safety



OVERVIEW: The Early Access & Stabilization Services (EASS) program provides restoration of competency services to individuals who are Incompetent to Stand Trial (IST) in real-time in the Kings County jail.

CHALLENGE: Throughout the State of California there are currently approximately 2,000 adults in jail facilities who are detained and are Incompetent to Stand Trial (IST) as a result of a mental health disorder, and this is an all-time high waitlist in California. As a result of the long waitlist, these adults are required to wait in jail for several months and sometimes close to one year to get into a Department of State Hospital (DSH) program for care, treatment, and services required to be restored to competency. Currently Kings County has an average of about 14-20 inmates out of our population of about 450 that cannot enter into a program from the Department of State Hospitals. Due to the high demand and limited hospital beds for treatment of defendants who are incompetent to stand trial, the Kings County jail implemented a program administrated through the Department of State Hospitals, referred to as a Jail Based Competency Treatment (JBCT) program. The JBCT is a program that follows the treatment program provided at the Department of State Hospitals, and it is a cost effective means by which to get the restoration services started at the jail much sooner than waiting for a DSH bed. This program incorporates psychiatry and medication management, psychological testing and evaluations, mental health treatment, and restoration services, all of which are individualized to our local patients' needs. Additionally, by administering the program in the jail, it serves as a public safety mechanism as well. That is, the inmates do not need to be transported to the department of state hospitals for their restoration services which saves in transportation costs as well as reduces risk to public safety. Additionally, not having to send deputies off site to transport inmates provides enhanced safety at the jails rather than creating a shortage of deputies due to the transportation. The jail based competency treatment has been very successful as the waitlist of inmates to get into the DSH programs is growing as is the wait to get into the programs. There is an immediate need for inmates who are incompetent to stand trial to receive restoration services much sooner than they have been historically, and ideally it would be as soon as they enter the facility.

SOLUTION: The County, in partnership with our current medical jail provider, Wellpath, were able to strategize opening an Early Access and Stabilization Services (EASS) program at the Kings County jail. Wellpath began to provide restoration services virtually, in-person, and a combination thereof for felony IST patients who are awaiting placement in a JBCT or DSH program. Patients who are not restored to competency in the Early Access and Psychiatric Stabilization program will be admitted to a JBCT/ DSH program. The overall goal is to start the restoration services as soon as possible following the court deeming the patient incompetent to stand trial and before the patient is admitted into a JBCT or DSH program. As such, Wellpath and Kings County strive to improve the level of cognitive functioning of inmates whose return to court is hindered by an inability to comprehend basic legal proceedings and an inability to assist in their own defense.

INNOVATION: The exceedingly long waitlist for patients who are incompetent to stand trial has been an added burden on most jails in California, as these are often the patients who refuse to take medication and who are the most mentally ill. As a result of the long waitlist for a JBCT or DSH program, patients often languish at the jails for long periods of time while their court case remains on hold. The long wait time to get into a DSH program caused patients' due process rights to be violated. That is, we all have a right to a fair and speedy trial, however patients who are accused of a crime and incompetent to stand trial are often waiting several months to a year to get their restoration services started. This violation of a patients' due process rights was determined by the courts in the *Stiavetti* case. In an effort to get patients engaged in restoration services as soon as possible following the court decision to deem the

**Early Access & Stabilization Services
CSAC 2022 Challenge Award Nomination
County of Kings**

Category: Administration of Justice
and Public Safety



individual to be incompetent to stand trial, Kings County was the first to participate in the Early Access and Stabilization Services program offered by Wellpath. In the EASS program there is a multi-disciplinary treatment team that works with the patients to get them stabilized on psychiatric medications as clinically indicated as soon as possible. The first step of the process is to address their medication needs. Additionally, mental health clinicians assist with mental health care and restoration services which are better understood once the patient's mind is clearer as a result of psychiatric stabilization. Nursing is another essential component of the treatment team, and there is a consistent nurse (12 hours daily, 7 days per week) providing medication and restoration services to the patients. The strategy is to have consistent nursing staff who build rapport with the patient which often contributes to patients taking their medications voluntarily. The Psychiatric Prescriber sees each patient weekly, typically in a virtual format, and the program nurse sits with the patient on his/ her side of the patient encounter. The nurse assists with vitals and lab draws as needed. As mentioned above, there is a mental health clinician who works with the patients both on recognizing and managing signs and symptoms of mental illness as well as on restoration services. The work with the mental health clinician can be in both an individual encounter or in a group format, and each patient is seen by mental health three times weekly. Patients receive their medications from the program nurse daily, and the nurse assists with some restoration activities as well. On a monthly basis, patients are seen in a treatment team meeting to review progress and update treatment pathways and/ or goals.

RESULTS: Since beginning the EASS program at Kings County on July 18, 2022, an individual has already been restored to competency without having to wait for enrollment into a DSH or JBCT program. All patients who are on the waitlist for a DSH/ JBCT program at Kings County are being enrolled into the EASS program in order to begin restoration services within about 48 hours of being notified of the patient's IST status by the Department of State Hospitals. It is incredible to see the fast turn around Kings County is able to offer to assist those who are most in need for services. Given that Kings County also has a JBCT program on-site, patients have smooth continuity of care into the JBCT when a bed becomes available, if the patient is not restored prior to his/ her bed becoming available. In addition to the smooth continuity of care, the program helps stabilize the patients sooner, thereby reducing the behavioral incidents that were happening.

REPLICABILITY: With the success story in Kings County, we are confident we can talk to other counties about entering into such programs for their jails. The program can easily be replicated across other California counties, as the implementation is flexible within the existing jail operations. The EASS program team is able to go to the various housing areas where patients reside, if they are not cluster housed, and there is a combination of both virtual and in-person services which assists in providing services to even the most remote areas of California.

PROGRAM CONTACTS:

Kyria Martinez,
Assistant County Administrative Officer
1400 W. Lacey Blvd., Hanford, CA 93230
559-852-2377
kyria.martinez@co.kings.ca.us

Chrystal Thomas
Detentions Captain
1570 Kings County Drive, Hanford, CA 93230
559-852-4136
Chrystal.Thomas@co.kings.ca.us

Additional Program Materials:

<http://www.countyofkings.com/departments/administration/county-administration/csac-challenge-nomination-eass-program-kings-county-2385>