



What Ohioans Think About Treatment vs. Prison for People with Severe Mental Illnesses Convicted of Non-Violent Crimes



Results From The Health Foundation of Greater Cincinnati



Almost 60% of Ohioans strongly favor treatment vs. prison for people with severe mental illnesses convicted of non-violent crimes, according to the 2008 *Ohio Health Issues Poll*. This is up from 45% in 2006. Slightly more Ohioans (64%) strongly favored treatment vs. prison for people with severe mental illnesses who are convicted of non-violent crimes *and* who have no prior criminal record.

For many people with severe mental illnesses who get in trouble with the law, community-based treatment is more effective than prison for addressing individual needs and preventing repeat run-ins with the law. Community-based treatment can also be more cost-effective than prison¹.

Ohioans in general see punishment as the lowest priority for dealing with crime in the state, the 2008 *Ohio Health Issues Poll* found. When asked which they thought should be the TOP

% of Ohioans who strongly favor replacing prison sentences with mandatory mental illness treatment programs for people with severe mental illnesses who...



priority for dealing with crime in Ohio, adults selected:

- Enforcement (34%), such as putting more police officers on the street
- Prevention (31%), such as education and youth programs
- Rehabilitation (21%), such as education and job training for prisoners
- Punishment (13%), such as longer sentences and more prisons

Stronger Support for Treatment vs. Prison

Between the 2006 and 2008 *Polls*, Ohio adults' attitudes toward treatment vs. prison for people with severe mental illnesses have shifted toward more strongly

favoring treatment. Since 2006, 13% of Ohioans have shifted their opinions and now strongly favor treatment over incarceration for people with severe mental illnesses who are convicted of a non-violent crime. Further, 26% of Ohioans indicated they somewhat favor treatment vs. prison, bringing the total who favor it to 84% in 2008, up slightly from 2006, when 78% favored it.

This increase in support for treatment vs. prison was true across almost all demographic groups. For the demographic groups that showed an opposite trend—that is, less support for treatment vs. prison—the differences between 2006 and 2008 are within the margin of error for the survey.

¹ *President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health (2003)*. Achieving the Promise: Transforming Mental Health Care in America.