



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 15  
Contact: Eric Wandersleben  
614.728.5090 | [eric.wandersleben@mha.ohio.gov](mailto:eric.wandersleben@mha.ohio.gov)

## Stepping Up National Day of Action Planned for May 16

In recognition of May as Mental Health Month, OhioMHAS will join peers across the nation to celebrate the three-year anniversary of *Stepping Up: A National Initiative to Reduce the Number of People with Mental Illnesses in Jails* with a Day of Action on May 16.

Stepping Up is a national initiative targeted at reducing the number of people with mental illnesses in jails. Without change, large numbers of people with mental illnesses (many with co-occurring substance use disorders) will continue to cycle through the criminal justice system, which can often result in missed opportunities to link them to treatment, tragic outcomes, inefficient use of funding and failure to improve public safety. The effort has seen remarkable progress, with more than 415 counties throughout the nation joining the movement by passing resolutions or proclamations to make this issue a top priority. Stepping Up Day of Action activities will take place across the country to share progress and raise public awareness of the issues facing individuals with mental illnesses, particularly those who are involved in or at risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system.

“Too many Ohioans with serious mental illness and substance use disorders are lingering in our jails — not getting the help they need,” said Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services Director Tracy Plouck. “By supporting the Stepping Up initiative, Ohio counties are banding together to reverse the cycle of jails serving as de facto mental health hospitals in our state and connecting people with the help they need.”

Stepping Up is led nationally by the National Association of Counties, the Council of State Governments Justice Center and the American Psychiatric Association Foundation. In Ohio, the Stepping Up initiative engages a diverse group of organizations, including those representing sheriffs, jail administrators, judges, community corrections professionals, treatment providers, people with mental illnesses and their families, mental health and substance use program directors, and other stakeholders.

“We are proud that Ohio has been a leader in Stepping Up,” said Retired Justice Evelyn Lundberg Stratton. “At the state level, we have a strong Steering Committee all working together to provide support and resources for our local counties. In the end, we will reduce our jail population, replace incarceration with treatment, and most importantly, improve the lives of those with mental illness by supporting them in recovery.”

Thus far, 41 Ohio counties have passed resolutions to join the effort and several of these counties are planning big events and promotions for the National Day of Action. (See page two for examples).

Learn more about their work on the Ohio Stepping Up web page: <http://mha.ohio.gov/Treatment/Criminal-Justice-Involvement/Stepping-Up>. Click [HERE](#) to download the Day of Action planning toolkit.

Following are examples of planned Stepping Up Day of Action activities from around the State:

- **Delaware County** is doing a social media campaign. Their local Stepping Up committee has its quarterly meeting on Thursday May 17<sup>th</sup>; members will take a picture on the steps of their commissioner's building, as they are all "Stepping Up Together."
- **Lorain County** will be conducting a CIT Officer of the Year awards event in conjunction with the Lorain County Commissioners Meeting on May 16th. Stepping Up Member and County Commissioner Lori Kokoski will be presenting the CIT Officer of the Year Award to the selected Police Officer and will also give honorable mention to all other officers nominated. Melissa Myers Fischer, the coordinator of Stepping Up, will co-present with Stepping Up Chair Holly Cundiff (Lorain County MH Board and CIT Steering Committee) and we will present highlights of Stepping Up's work over the past year.
- **Lucas County** will hold a press conference in Toledo to promote the work of their initiative and speak directly about the county's efforts for the Stepping Up initiative. Some of their accomplishments include: over 100 Crisis Intervention Trainings (CIT) yearly, Sequential Intercept Mapping to organize targeted strategies for justice-involved individuals with behavioral health disorders, and the creation of a behavioral health/criminal justice coordinator.
- **Montgomery County** will be hosting tables in the lobbies of several of their Courts and Administration buildings to share information on Stepping Up, Mental Health awareness, CIT, and information on many of their wonderful treatment agencies across the county. We have signs and banners printed, as well as Stepping Up t-shirts that they are proudly wearing. CareSource has also funded a week long billboard ad that will run along I-75 in Dayton.
- **Shelby County** plans to hold a ground-breaking ceremony for our STAR Transitional Treatment House in conjunction with National Stepping Up Day. The Commissioners will be presenting a Proclamation during the event. The Shelby County Sheriff's Office will host a ceremonial groundbreaking for the STAR House (Sheriff's Treatment and Recovery House) May 16 at 2:00 PM at 555 Gearhart Road, Sidney, adjacent to the Sheriff's Office and Jail. The ceremony, open to the public, will also recognize local efforts in the National Stepping Up Initiative to help alleviate the number of persons in jail with severe mental illness.