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## CALIFORNIA COURTS

THE JUDICIAL BRANCH OF CALIFORNIA

# Mental Health Courts

### What are Mental Health Courts?

Mental health courts are a type of problem solving court that combine judicial supervision with community mental health treatment and other support services in order to reduce criminal activity and improve the quality of life of participants. The first mental health court was established in Florida in 1997 with California implementing its first mental health courts in 1999. Mental health courts are established to make more effective use of limited criminal justice and mental health resources, to connect individuals to treatment and other social services in the community, to improve outcomes for offenders with mental illness in the criminal justice system, to respond to public safety concerns, and to address jail overcrowding and the disproportionate number of people with mental illness in the criminal justice system.

### Common Elements in Mental Health Courts

Participation in a mental health court is voluntary. The defendant must consent to participation before being placed in the program.

Each jurisdiction accepts only persons with demonstrable mental illnesses to which their involvement in the criminal justice system can be attributed.

The key objective of a mental health court is to either prevent the jailing of offenders with mental illness by diverting them to appropriate community services or to significantly reduce time spent incarcerated.

Public safety is a high priority, and offenders with mental illness are carefully screened for appropriate inclusion in the program.

Early intervention is essential, with screening and referral occurring as soon as possible after arrest.

A multidisciplinary team approach is used, with the involvement of justice system representatives, mental health providers, and other support systems.

Intensive case management includes supervision of participants, with a focus on accountability and monitoring of each participant's performance.

The judge oversees the treatment and supervision process and facilitates collaboration among mental health court team members.

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### Resources

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