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## Ohio's prisons hold 10 times as many mentally psychiatric hospitals do



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Dr. Kathryn Burns, left, chief psychiatrist for state prisons, talks with inmate Quiana Froe, who has improved with treatment.

By **Alan Johnson**

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MARYSVILLE, Ohio — The largest provider of mental-health services in Ohio is easier than the nearest state prison.

More than 10,500 people in Ohio prisons, more than 1 in 5, have a diagnosed mental a serious and persistent condition such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. There are mentally ill inmates as there are patients in Ohio's six psychiatric hospitals.

The numbers are higher for females: 41 percent of 2,510 inmates at the Ohio Reformatory for Women in Marysville are on the mental-health caseload.

Terry Russell, executive director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness Ohio, said there are no accidents.

"These people are generally not in prison because they are criminals," he said. "Mostly there are the most severely mentally disabled who get into trouble because they are untreated. Families many times desert them or don't know how to help. They end up putting them in harm's way. In most cases, law enforcement gets involved."

Quiana Froe, 35, of Scioto County, is one of more than 1,000 women with mental illness in prison. Froe said she had a mental breakdown midway through a previous eight-year

"I started hearing voices," she said. "I had heard them before, but I thought it was the

When Froe's mental illness caused her to act out, she was thrown into a segregation unit, she said, the voices continued calling to her through the vents in her cell. "There were no voices," she said quietly.

She was released from prison but committed a new crime and ended up back in Marysville. Lack of treatment made her condition worse.

When she came back, things were different. She now receives treatment and medication for bipolar disorder, and she is much calmer and "at peace," she said. If problems recur, '



Rita Greifenstein, a 78-year-old inmate, said that officials "haven't found the medicine that works for me yet."

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say central Ohio sheriffs

someone to talk it out.”

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Taxpayers pay the hefty tab for the 10,596 mentally ill inmates. The Ohio Department of Correction spent \$41.7 million on mental-health care and medications in fiscal year 2014 and will spend \$49 million this year. That is on top of the \$22,836 annual overall cost per inmate.

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Gary Mohr signed up to run state prisons, not mental-health facilities, but he's doing more for inmates with mental health issues, and the costs related to mentally ill inmates, Mohr opened residential treatment units including the Marysville facility. He is opening a fifth at the Grafton Correctional Institute, hiring 27 more mental-health staffers and adding beds at the Allen Oakwood Correctional Institute where seriously mentally ill inmates are housed.

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Mohr said he is relaxing the long-standing policy of segregating mentally ill inmates with other inmates.

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“We are coming up with a policy where we do not keep inmates who are mentally ill in prison. Segregation is our default sanction, but our goal is to ensure that the behavior that got them there doesn't happen again. This is going to be a major reform in Ohio and across the U.S.”

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Mohr also is pushing for greater support and more funding for mental-health courts, in 88 counties, to divert mentally ill people to less-costly, more-effective programs.

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“If these courts become familiar with the issues and can find suitable placements, parole is a possibility. We ought to be doing that instead of just launching them into prison.”

» FBI crime statistics

Dr. Kathryn Burns, chief psychiatrist in the prison system, said people with mental health issues are arrested more often because their untreated behavior brings them into conflict with the legal system, they have fewer chances of getting community treatment or probation because of limited options. The offenders have burned bridges with family members and in the end, prison is often the last resort.

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“They are our family members. They are going to come home. Very few people will stay in prison,” Burns said.

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Ohio Reformatory for Women Warden Roni Burkes adds, “Folks should care because these are our mothers, daughters, sisters. They deserve care like anybody else.”

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Welcome to The Columbus Dispatch:

Rita Greifenstein, 78, from Lake County, who is serving four years for voluntary manslaughter and anxiety disorders and post-traumatic stress syndrome. She has struggled with mental health issues since age 5 and has been in and out of state institutions.

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The stigma of mental illness exists inside prison walls just as it does in the outside world. Other housing units at Marysville have names such as Lincoln, Kennedy and Harmon. The Residential Treatment Unit, marking them as different. Greifenstein said women are often housed by other inmates.

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The Ohio Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services is working with prisons inmates with substance-abuse problems, but the agencies aren't yet sharing services t

"For individuals who are exhibiting symptoms, the first interface with the system is c Dr. Mark Hurst, medical director of the mental-health agency. "Not all those individu jail."

But the agencies are cooperating to find treatment, housing and employment for ex-o personnel begin working with inmates up to 90 days before they are released so they access to treatment.

The expansion of the federal Medicaid program by Gov. John Kasich's administration difference, officials from both agencies said. While Medicaid can't be used to treat inn applies once they are discharged. The state has signed up all female prisoners for Mec enroll the men.

While there are encouraging developments, NAMI Director Russell remains troubled become asylums for the mentally ill. The organization's statewide conference on Frida Hyatt Regency will focus on "criminalization" of the mentally ill.

"We just have no place for those individuals who are ill enough to be in harm's way b end up in a hospital," he said. "Criminalizing the mentally ill just makes no sense fro economic standpoint."

*Information about the conference on mental health and prisons is online at bit.ly/1...*

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**TOMMY LAND (LVHHTVTX)**

Sad but true.



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**P.C. (MISTYMORNINGSTRANGER)**

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