

Spearheaded by the Alachua County Planning Committee in 2008, the CJMHSAG program has played a leading role in furthering the county's commitment to stop the cycle of incarceration for adult individuals with mental illness and/or substance use disorders. The funding for the Criminal Justice, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Reinvestment Grant (CJMHSAG) ended on March 30, 2023. This led to some significant gaps in service when the State funding ended. At the end of the three-year grant cycle of (CJMHSAG) April 1, 2020-March 30, 2023, the following services were impacted, resulting in elimination or reduction of available services to citizens involved in the criminal justice system identified with significant mental health or mental health and substance abuse problems in Alachua County.

- Elimination of funding for transitional housing for those entering the CJMHSAG Forensic program, including funding for space at the Meridian Lodge transitional housing. Lack of housing is a major social determinant of recidivism for program participants.
- Significant reduction in jail engagement for those booked at the county jail, resulting in longer/extended jail stays prior to release, due to lack of forensics team (clinicians, prescriber, peer specialists and care coordinators) involvement to serve and monitor participants released to the community. This team drafted conditional release plans for the court, which was considered by judge(s) in their decision to release detainees to the community. CJMHSAG provided funding to this team at Meridian to serve, monitor, and link participants to basic needs, physical healthcare, vocational, educational, and natural supports (support groups NA/AA, family members, NAMI etc.). Status reports on each participant were provided to the court on progress on the court conditions of release.
- Significant Reduction of prioritized post release psychiatric services and medication.
- Elimination of robust array of specialized groups to serve participants through daily groups for participants based on evidence-based care.
- Elimination of dedicated specialized reporting to Alachua County Probation, inclusive of in-person meetings with probation staff.
- Elimination of funding to provide Mental Health First Aid and Trauma Informed Criminal Justice Response training to law enforcement, law enforcement sworn officers, correctional officers and support personnel, judicial staff, non-profit agencies, and other key community stakeholders.
- Dedicated SSDI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) staff to expedite applications for disability benefits.
- Basic need support and contingency funds to assist with short term provision of bus passes, rental assistance, clothing/clothing for interviews, and hygiene items. Providing participants with these items assists in their efforts towards self-sufficiency.

Lutheran Health Systems, a managing entity for the State of Florida, has funded a wraparound mental health team to specifically serve individuals identified as Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity (NGI) and Incompetent to Proceed. This funding is targeted and is subject to year-to-year state appropriation approval, (i.e. not guaranteed to recur each year). This funded population is only a subsection of citizens that were served under CJMHSAG funding. Only 45 individuals can be served at a time with this funding.. Under CJMHSAG, the approximate average was 120 clients (average 6–9-month length of care/enrollment).

The State has issued a new request for proposal (RFP) to re-introduce the Criminal Justice, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Reinvestment Grant (CJMHSAG) program. Meridian is proposing to apply through the RFP process to re-implement the CJMHSAG services. A primary purpose of the CJMHSAG program is to divert a primary target population of individuals who have mental illness and/or substance use disorders from the jails. Our Program will focus on pre-arrest initiatives through funding a Co-Responder Team that will work with the Alachua County Sheriff Department to assist citizens with mental illness and/or substance use disorders prior to arrest. The Program will also re-establish many of the CJMHSAG services that were lost when the funding ended using the sequential intercept model. This will allow CJMHSAG to regain integrated service array across all Intercept levels, including outreach,

screening/assessment, case management, treatment, recovery support services, peer services and aftercare. These integrated diversion services will include a care coordinated, team-based approach with the objective of helping high need, high-risk individuals navigate complex service systems in the community.

The proposed program expansion will include the following components:

1. ***Pre-booking utilizing the Co-Responder model:*** This model will consist of two full-time employees: a Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) trained Sheriff Officer and a master's level mental health clinician. The officer and clinician will partner together on a flexible 40-hour shift and will ride in a marked police vehicle to respond to calls for service involving persons with mental illness, mental health crisis, as well as calls involving emotionally charged situations.
2. ***Post-booking clinical assessment and treatment services for inmates transitioning to the community from the Alachua County jails:*** In response to stakeholder identified needs, we will reallocate and expand clinical resources to allow biopsychosocial assessment and initial treatment services to begin in the jail. The population CJMHSAG serves often experience extended jail stays before release as they wait for the court process and other factors. As a result, access to timely treatment may be delayed for these individuals, placing them more at risk for mental health decompensation and/or substance use relapse after reentry.
3. ***Transitional housing in the Meridian Lodge dedicated for CJMHSAG program participants facing housing barriers upon reentry:*** Although the program aims to take a Housing First approach to helping each client in need find permanent housing, lack of housing in the area has been identified as one of the most serious social determinants of recidivism for program participants. In addition to the area's local housing shortage, reentering ex-offenders in general, and those facing substance abuse and mental health issues in particular, face difficulties and barriers to permanent housing.

The efficacy of CJHMSAG's overall efforts is evidenced in positive performance outcomes, such as an 78% reduction in new charges for CJMHSAG participants and a 59% reduction in jail days two years pre- and post- admission for the last cycle. CMHSAG funding will enable both counties and the region to further this progress and continue to move forward in realizing long-term, comprehensive systems change for our clients and community.