



Administrative Office of the Courts

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Summit to focus on improving how communities and courts respond to people with mental illness

SANTA FE – Court leaders and county-based teams from across New Mexico will convene next week to develop priorities for better assisting people with behavioral health needs who become involved with the justice system.

“The behavioral health summit will allow stakeholders in our communities and courts to learn about strategies on the national and local level that can be collaboratively implemented to improve outcomes for individuals with mental health issues,” said Chief Justice C. Shannon Bacon. “Proper intervention can help individuals who otherwise may repeatedly end up in court and in jail because they are experiencing a behavioral health crisis.”

The summit starts Monday, Oct. 17, and ends Wednesday. Among those attending will be county officials, law enforcement, providers of behavioral health services, judges and court staff.

“Teams from New Mexico’s counties will develop local plans with priorities that meet the unique needs of their communities for addressing the behavioral health issues of people at various points in the justice system – from initial law enforcement encounters to courts, jails and release from detention,” said Justice Briana H. Zamora. She will moderate a panel at the summit on intervention practices in the public health system and communities.

Those at the summit will use the nationally recognized “[Sequential Intercept Model](#)” as a tool to catalog locally available behavioral health resources, identify gaps in services and establish priorities for implementation of responses.

Planning of the New Mexico summit began after court leaders attended a regional meeting of the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators in 2019 on the topic of improving responses to those with mental illness. Since then, state judges have received training on mental health issues and the Supreme Court formed an interdisciplinary working group that helped organize the summit. The working group included judges and representatives of the New Mexico Association of Counties, the state Behavioral Health Services Division, the University of New Mexico School of Law and the National Center for State Courts. The

Supreme Court also established a permanent commission to improve how the justice system responds to people with mental health related issues. Justice Zamora serves as the Court's liaison to the commission.

On the final day of the summit, retired Justice Judith Nakamura and Administrative Office of the Courts Director Artie Pepin will serve as facilitators as the teams from each county report on their action plans.

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