

Increasing Mental Health Needs In Prisons

The Iowa Board of Corrections heard from two of the department's doctors on the growing number of mentally ill inmates in Iowa's prisons. The need for mental health care is higher for women than men; 59% of the women in prison and 39% of the men are in need of mental health care.

At the beginning of March 2010, there were 8,324 offenders in Iowa's prisons. Of that number 3,846, or 46%, have been diagnosed with a mental illness that required ongoing psychiatric treatment, and 2,455, or 29%, met the criteria for seriously mentally ill. Seriously mentally ill includes diagnosis's such as bipolar, schizophrenia, and those who are intellectually and developmentally challenged.

The Department of Corrections tries to treat these inmates successfully. Telemedicine is used for patients with mental health issues, in conjunction with on-site visits, which makes it easier for doctors to treat patients and saves on costs.

After the renovation and expansion at Mitchellville (Iowa's only women's prison) and the newly built Fort Madison maximum security prison, the department will be able to better house those with a mental illness separate from the general population, if needed.