

UNDERSTANDING THE POPULATION OF PEOPLE WITH FREQUENT JAIL CONTACT

HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS



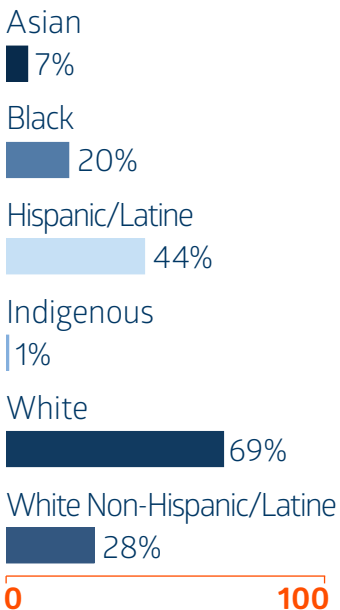
POPULATION: 4,731,145

AVERAGE JAIL POPULATION: 9,988

POPULATION EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS: 3,567

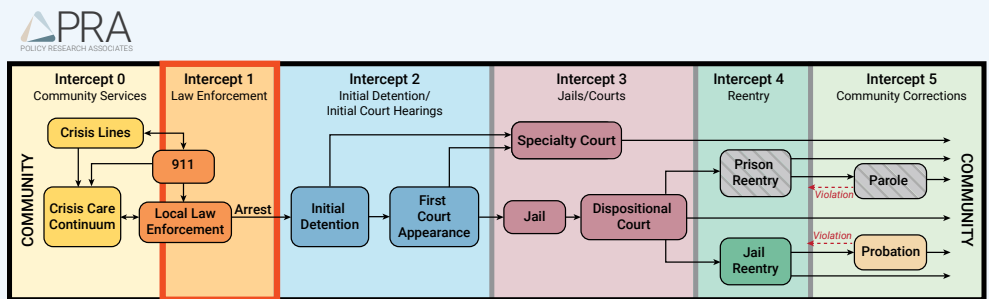
COUNTY SEAT: HOUSTON, 4TH LARGEST CITY IN U.S.

RACIAL/ETHNIC DEMOGRAPHICS:



Statistics according to 2020 census data.

The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD in Harris County offers a wide range of services to both people in jail and people in the community, including the Mental Health Jail Diversion Program. This program offers a community-based alternative to incarceration for people with mental illness who have been charged with low-level, non-violent offenses, providing treatment that could help prevent them from cycling in and out of jail. The Mental Health Jail Diversion Program is at Intercept 1 of the Sequential Intercept Model (SIM).



Abreu, D., Parker, T. W., Noether, C. D., Steadman, H. J., & Case, B. (2017). Revising the paradigm for jail diversion for people with mental and substance use disorders: Intercept 0. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 35(5-6), 380-395. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.2300>
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“So many of [the people in jail in Harris County] do have substance use issues, [and] many of them don’t see [a] mental health service [provider]...”

JAIL BOOKINGS BY THE NUMBERS (JANUARY 2011 TO APRIL 2021)

- ▶ **539,512** bookings
- ▶ **289,714** people booked
- ▶ **33** is the average age at booking (range 17–94)
- ▶ **77%** of bookings were men
- ▶ **65%** of bookings were People of Color
- ▶ **3** is the median number of bookings among people booked more than once (project definition for “frequent jail contact”)

“It is a big struggle. They’re homeless, they probably don’t have documentation, they don’t have an ID, they don’t have a birth certificate... [They have] very little resources or nothing at all, no transportation, so it makes it really hard. So they end up trespassing, they end up sleeping where they can, end up stealing because they’re hungry, they end up panhandling, they get picked up for that because they’re trying to get some money. They do what they can to survive.”

KEY FINDINGS

Characteristics of People with Frequent Jail Contact

- ▶ People with frequent jail contact (i.e., 3 or more bookings during study period) represent almost **half of bookings**



but only about **one fifth of people booked.**



- ▶ People of Color were twice as likely to have frequent jail contact than were white people.
- ▶ Black people represented just over one-third of jail bookings but almost half of people with frequent jail contact.
- ▶ More than half of people with frequent jail contact had a mental health flag associated with their booking compared to about one-third of people booked overall.
- ▶ A greater percentage of women than men with frequent jail contact had a mental health flag associated with their booking.
- ▶ A greater percent of white people than People of Color with frequent jail contact had a mental health flag associated with their booking.

Outcomes

- ▶ There were about 200 fewer jail bookings for trespassing charges per month, on average, following the implementation of the Mental Health Jail Diversion Program.
- ▶ There was no change in the number of misdemeanor bookings following the implementation of the Mental Health Jail Diversion Program.
- ▶ There was no change in the number of bookings for people with frequent jail contact following the implementation of the Mental Health Jail Diversion Program.
- ▶ The percentage of bookings with a mental health flag among people with frequent jail contact increased following the implementation of the Mental Health Jail Diversion Program.
- ▶ Average length of stay decreased following the implementation of the Mental Health Jail Diversion Program.

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