

MHA statement on executive order “Ending Crime and Disorder on America’s Streets”

Date

July 26, 2025

Alexandria, VA (July 26, 2025) – Mental Health America (MHA) is deeply concerned by the administration’s new executive order, “Ending Crime and Disorder on America’s Streets,” which conflates mental illness and homelessness with criminal behavior. This approach not only undermines decades of progress in mental health care and housing policy, it threatens the personal freedom, dignity, and safety of the very people it claims to help.

MHA’s President and CEO, Schroeder Stribling said: “Every person deserves the safety and dignity of a place to live and access to care that supports their long-term well-being. Mental health challenges and homelessness are not criminal issues, they are basic human and public health issues. Having worked in homeless services for two decades, I’ve seen firsthand how people recover and thrive when they have stable housing with strong community support systems. That’s where our focus must be: on efforts to foster stability and improved well-being. This executive order moves us in the wrong direction, relying on outdated ideas of forced institutionalization rather than investing in strategies which are proven effective as long-term solutions.”

Addressing homelessness and its underlying root causes is an urgent public health issue. The order’s emphasis on forced institutionalization, increased surveillance, and the sharing of sensitive health information across federal agencies raises serious concerns. These measures risk deterring people from seeking help, increasing stigma, and causing greater long-term harm to those already vulnerable.

While housing and community-based behavioral health services require investment, institutionalization—whether in jails, prisons, or hospitals—is significantly more expensive and far less effective over time. Research and experience show that early, voluntary intervention, delivered by trained outreach workers and paired with supportive housing, is both a more humane and more cost-effective strategy. There are successful models across the country where this kind of partnership is working, such as in the work done by MHA affiliates across the country.

This harmful shift in policy comes on top of recent bills to drastically cut Medicaid, the backbone of mental health care in America, which funds a quarter of all mental health services and nearly 40% of all substance use treatment. For millions of children, veterans, young adults, and people in recovery, Medicaid is the difference between receiving essential care and falling through the cracks. Deep cuts to Medicaid while criminalizing those in crisis only deepens existing disparities and makes it even more difficult for people to access care, housing, and support before they reach a point of emergency.

Mental illness is not a crime. Homelessness is not a failure of personal responsibility. These are systemic challenges that require systemic solutions like access to affordable housing, early and voluntary mental health care, and sustained investment in community-based solutions.

“At the heart of every effective solution is the simple truth that people need to be met where they are. Responding to mental health challenges and homelessness with criminalization and short term involuntary interventions instead of compassionate and evidence-based care will only deepen the crisis. For both individuals and affected communities, real healing happens when we invest in people’s long-term healing and well-being, offering stable housing access to care rooted in respect and dignity for all,” Stribling said.

About Mental Health America

Mental Health America is the nation’s leading community-driven nonprofit dedicated to promotion of mental health, well-being, and prevention. Mental Health America’s work is driven by its commitment to promote mental health as a critical part of whole person health, including prevention services for all; early identification and intervention for those at risk; and integrated care, services and supports for those who need them. Learn more at mhanational.org.

Media contact: media@mhanational.org

<https://mhanational.org/news/statement-on-executive-order-ending-crime-and-disorder-on-americas-streets/>