



## Connection Between Meth Use, Mental Illness Found Among San Diego Arrestees

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By Tarryn Mento

Mental illness was more likely among San Diego County adult arrestees who had ever used methamphetamine compared to those who had no history with the drug, according to a report released Friday. The analysis by San Diego Association of Governments, or SANDAG, also found a higher rate of homelessness among those who had used meth and had a mental health condition.

The study comes as **meth use in the county remains high** and the region is struggling to assist the growing population of people **living on the street**.

Of the 467 arrestees **interviewed for the report**, 41% that had used meth at least once in their lifetime said they had received a mental illness diagnosis. That's compared to 22% of arrestees who had never used meth but had a diagnosed mental health condition.

Meth users were also more likely to have previously spent a night in a mental health facility — 28% said they had experienced an overnight stay compared to 16% of non-meth users.

Cynthia Burke, Research and Program Management Director for SANDAG, said the results were unique to users of meth.

"These statistical findings weren't the same for individuals with the other drug use histories," Burke said in a phone interview with KPBS.

She said there was no strong link between when an arrestee used meth and when they received their mental illness diagnosis.

Overall, 153 arrestees that had used meth also had either a diagnosis or stayed overnight in a facility. The report dubbed them the "meth-mental health group" and found they were more likely to be homeless or to have ever experienced homelessness than other arrestees.

Fifty-eight percent of the meth-mental health group was without a home at the time of arrest and 86% had ever been homeless, compared to 29% and 55%, respectively, of other arrestees.

The report is based on interviews with adults booked in county detention facilities last year. More than half of male arrestees and almost a third of female arrestees tested positive for methamphetamine — the highest rate in 19 years, although the male rate has remained unchanged since 2016.

San Diego County is developing a **regional hub in the city of San Diego's Hillcrest neighborhood** that would house mental health and substance use treatment services at the same location.

The board of supervisors unanimously voted late last month to proceed with the proposed \$110 million to \$115 million project and develop a partnership with UC San Diego Health and Scripps Health to provide services. At the meeting, the elected officials also pushed forward a conservatorship program that could make it easier to **order some people** into treatment.