

Police officers with a Crisis Intervention Team, which had received training in de-escalation techniques for mental health emergencies.

Photograph by Stan Carroll, featured in *The Commercial Appeal*

Courtesy The Commercial Appeal/
USA Today



In the late 20th century, new issues of custody re-emerged in mental health. People who could not access adequate social services and medical care became vulnerable to arrest in an era of mass incarceration.

Police departments began conducting trainings to foster a better understanding of mental health conditions. Advocates have argued for a less coercive and more community-based approach to recovery.

Care & Custody

Past Responses to Mental Health

Over the past 200 years, a tension has existed between care and custody as responses to people with mental health conditions.

www.nlm.nih.gov/careandcustody

At one time, this jail held 9,000 people and about one-third of them had a mental health condition.

Mental health division in Cook County Jail in Chicago, photograph by Lili Kobielski

Courtesy Lili Kobielski



 National Library of Medicine

The National Library of Medicine produced this exhibition.

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Guest curator: Anne E. Parsons, PhD
Designer: HealyKohler Design

A patient at St. Elizabeths Hospital, Washington, D.C., 1955

Courtesy National Library of Medicine



A dining hall for African Americans residents at St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, D.C., 1915

Courtesy National Archives and Records Administration



President John F. Kennedy signed legislation in 1963 that allocated funds for new community mental health centers.

Bill Signing – S. 1576, Mental Retardation Facilities and Community Mental Health Center Construction Act, photograph by Abbie Rowe, 1963

Courtesy John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum

Social reformers in the 1800s advocated for asylums as isolated environments intended to provide care away from society. Between 1880 and 1920, public asylums focused more on custody as they became overcrowded and underfunded.

By World War II, public asylums held around half a million people, prompting advocates to call for change.

Design proposal of the Sheppard Asylum by Calvert Vaux, 1860

Courtesy National Library of Medicine



Author and activist Judi Chamberlin fought against the coercive treatment of people with psychiatric histories. Her work inspired a new vision of peer-support services.

Photograph of Judi Chamberlin, ca. 1985

Courtesy Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts at Amherst



Beginning in the 1950s, changes in psychiatry, mental health policy, and the law converged to create a more inclusive vision of mental health.

Agencies including the National Institute of Mental Health advocated for new centers that provided outpatient and inpatient services in local communities. Advocates also argued against coercive treatments and have worked to protect the rights of people with mental health conditions.

Psychopathic Ward, lithograph by Robert Riggs, 1945

Courtesy National Library of Medicine

