

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and the Criminal Justice System

Traumatic brain injury is a bump, blow or jolt to the head that disrupts the way the brain normally works. It can cause cognitive, physical, emotional and behavioral challenges.

Awareness of TBI in the criminal justice system is important.

- A brain injury can affect a person's behavior, ability to process information and physical condition.
- Many people involved in the criminal justice system are living with traumatic brain injury-related challenges that can complicate their self-management and treatment.
- According to the Centers for Disease Control and prevention (CDC), 25-87 percent of people involved with the criminal justice system report having a history of head injury or TBI as compared to 8.5 percent who report having this history in the general population.
- Women involved with the criminal justice system convicted of a violent crime are more likely to have sustained a pre-crime TBI and/or some other form of physical abuse (CDC).
- People involved with the criminal justice system who have experienced head injuries may also experience mental health problems such as severe depression and anxiety, substance use disorders, difficulty controlling anger, or suicidal thoughts and/or attempts (CDC).
- A TBI can contribute to situations that lead to disciplinary action within a correctional setting as well as challenges to re-entering the community successfully.

Some of the most common symptoms of TBI include but are not limited to:

- Difficulty with balance or muscle control
- Slurred speech, impaired vision and/or hearing
- Difficulty with attention, memory, understanding, and/ or judgment
- Reduced problem-solving and decision-making skills
- Delayed thought processing and/or response time
- Impulsive behaviors
- Anxiousness, irritability or agitation
- Depression
- Seizures, fatigue or other medical conditions



In an effort to increase awareness, a person with a brain injury can carry a survivor wallet card to help avoid misunderstandings with law enforcement, first responders and others. The wallet card includes contact information, an emergency contact and possible symptoms of brain injury. The brain injury survivor wallet card can be found by clicking the link below or by visiting www.bianc.net

Click here for a printable version of the Brain Injury Survivor Wallet Card.

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TBI Screening Tools

The websites below provide screening tools that are not for diagnostic purposes.

The Ohio State University TBI Identification Method (OSU TBI-ID)

www.ohiovalley.org/informationeducation

HELPS Brain Injury Screening Tool

North Carolina TBI Training Module 3: HELPS

www.nctbitraining.org

For resources and referral for TBI services, contact:

Brain Injury Association of North Carolina (BIANC)

www.bianc.net

Brain Injury Resource Centers

Raleigh 800-377-1464

Charlotte 704-355-1502

Winston Salem 336-713-8582

Asheville 828-277-4868

Greenville 252-717-3347

Training on TBI in North Carolina

www.nctbitraining.org

For more information about TBI and the Criminal Justice System, visit:

Traumatic Brain Injury in Prisons and Jails: An Unrecognized Problem

TBI -A Guide for Criminal Justice Professionals

Centers for Disease Control -CDC

www.cdc.gov

BrainLine.org

www.brainline.org

*You can find this TBI and CJ information sheet along with additional TBI information at the
North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services website.*

<http://www.ncdhhs.gov/assistance/disability-services/traumatic-brain-injury>



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Division of Social Services
www.ncdhhs.gov • www.ncdhhs.gov/dss

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