

APA Official Actions

Position Statement on Restrictive Housing of Incarcerated Adults with Serious Mental Illness

Approved by the Board of Trustees, July 2023

Approved by the Assembly, May 2023

“Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees. . . These are . . . position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects. . .” – *APA Operations Manual*

Issue:

Restrictive housing (aka solitary confinement or segregation) is commonly employed by jail and prison authorities for disciplinary reasons, institutional safety, or personal safety (i.e., protective custody). Restrictive housing has the potential for psychiatric conditions to clinically deteriorate because of restrictions on social interaction, limited out-of-cell or outdoor time, difficulty accessing health care, and other factors that may contribute to the exacerbation of psychiatric illness.

APA Position:

Restrictive housing of incarcerated adults with serious mental illness, with rare exceptions that involve significant danger to others, should be avoided due to the potential for harm to such individuals. If an individual with serious mental illness is placed in restrictive housing, in which one is confined to a cell for 22 or more hours per day, out-of-cell structured therapeutic activities (e.g., mental health/psychiatric treatment) in appropriate programming space and regular unstructured out-of-cell time should be provided to maximize access to clinically indicated programming, treatment, recreation and transfer to a more therapeutic settings.

Author: Rahn K. Bailey, MD; Elizabeth Ford, MD; Nathaniel P. Morris, MD; Jeffrey Metzner, MD; Raymond Patterson, MD

Collaborators: Council on Psychiatry and Law