

Care & Custody: Past Responses to Mental Health – NLM Traveling Exhibit!



Galter Health Sciences Library is pleased to host the National Library of Medicine's traveling exhibition [*Care & Custody: Past Responses to Mental Health*](#), on display in the [library atrium](#) from February 9 – March 21, 2026. The exhibition traces over 200 years of shifting responses to mental health in the United States, examining the enduring tension between care and custody as approaches to treatment and social control.

Visitors to *Care & Custody* will encounter historical photographs, documents, and personal stories that illustrate how mental health care in the United States has evolved over the past two centuries. Exhibition panels trace the rise of 19th-century state asylums, the overcrowded and custodial conditions that followed, and the exposés that spurred reform movements after World War II. Additional sections examine the effects of deinstitutionalization and the ways inadequate support systems contributed to the growing criminalization of people with mental health conditions. The exhibit encourages viewers to consider how earlier systems continue to

influence today's challenges and how communities are working toward more inclusive, humane approaches to care.

The National Library of Medicine produced *Care & Custody: Past Responses to Mental Health* and the companion website. Guest curated by **Anne E. Parsons, PhD** (University of North Carolina at Greensboro).

NLM Exhibition Resources

The NLM Traveling Exhibition includes a companion website with the following resources and supplemental materials:

- [Digital Gallery](#)
 - [Exhibition Collection](#)
 - [University Education Resources and Modules](#)
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Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back: The Continued Struggle to Treat Mental Illness in America – Galter's Companion Exhibit



Galter team members have also curated [*Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back*](#), a companion exhibit that follows the shifting medical and societal responses to mental illness in the United States from the 18th century to the present. Through cases examining institutional confinement, new treatment approaches, child psychiatry, and the increasing involvement of police, the exhibit shows a recurring cycle of progress met with setbacks. On display in the Eckenhoof Reading Room, the exhibit underscores the ongoing challenges in building systems that effectively support mental health.

Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back: The Continued Struggle to Treat Mental Illness in America was curated by **Emma Florio, Katie Lattal, Corinne Miller, Lindsey O'Brien, and Annie Wescott**. It was designed by **Katie Lattal and Emma Florio**.

Related Events & Activities

Curator Tour of *Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back*

- Tuesday, February 24, 12–1 PM
- Join the curators for a guided tour of *Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back*
- [Register here](#)

Special Collections Exhibit Open House

- Tuesday, March 3, 11 AM – 4 PM <https://planitpurple.northwestern.edu/event/638962>
- Drop in to explore Special Collections materials that deepen the themes presented in both exhibits.

Memoir Display in Dollie's Corner

- Browse a selection of memoirs written by individuals hospitalized for mental illness, available to check out.
- Curated by Lindsey O'Brien

Mindful Collage

- As a creative study break alongside *Care and Custody*, this activity invites visitors to consider how they reset and care for their minds. Participants can collage, draw, or color and may choose to share their work on a collective display board.

For questions or more information contact us at ghsl-specialcollections@northwestern.edu.

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