

ADDRESSING ADDICTION CARE IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM



Because substance use and addiction are largely criminalized in the United States, addiction is pervasive in the criminal justice system, where the focus has been on punishment instead of treatment. Failing to address addiction effectively in the criminal justice system is a key barrier to ending the addiction epidemic and preventing and reducing crime through evidence-based treatment and rehabilitation. Health-based rather than punitive approaches should be used at every point of contact with the system to identify substance use and addiction and respond appropriately.

85% of incarcerated adults are substance involved¹

Only 10% of incarcerated individuals with addiction receive care²

12X increased risk for overdose in 2 weeks after release from prison³

Every \$1 spent on addiction treatment saves \$7 in criminal justice costs⁴

Key recommendations for addressing addiction care in the criminal justice system:

- Provide prevention and early intervention for at-risk groups (e.g., adolescents who face risk factors)
- Expand role of law enforcement in addiction care (e.g., no-arrest, referral to treatment programs)
- Implement and support diversion programs and require programs to use evidence-based treatment (e.g., alternative to arrest programs, drug courts)
- Provide evidence-based treatment within jails and prisons
- Provide connections to treatment and support services upon re-entry

MAT should be incorporated as standard practice for individuals who are involved with the criminal justice system.

Effective treatment for opioid addiction involves the use of FDA-approved medications. The use of medications for addiction treatment (MAT) increases the likelihood of engaging in aftercare upon release, decreases re-arrest and recidivism, and reduces the risk for overdose upon release. Use of medications should not prevent someone from participating in or completing their drug court or other justice requirements.

Additional Resources:

- **Center on Addiction**, [Ending the Opioid Crisis: A Practical Guide for State Policymakers](#) (ch. 5)
- **Politico Magazine**, [How the Smallest State is Defeating America's Biggest Addiction Crisis](#)

Sources:

1. The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University. (2010). *Behind bars II: Substance abuse and America's prison population*. New York: Author.
2. Zarkin, G.A., Cowell, A.J., Hicks, K.A., Mills, M.J., Belenko, S., Dunlap, L.J., & Keyes, V. (2015). Lifetime benefits and costs of diverting substance-abusing offenders from state prison. *Crime & Delinquency*, 61(6), 829-850.
3. Binswanger, I.A., Stern, M.F., Deyo, R.A., Heagerty, P.J., Cheadle, A., Elmore, J.G., & Koepsell, T.D. (2007). Release from prison – A high risk of death for former inmates. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 356(2), 157-165.
4. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Office of the Surgeon General. (2016). *Facing Addiction in America: The Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health*. Washington, D.C.: HHS.

